

SCUBA

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THE ACTIVE DIVER'S MAGAZINE

JUNE 1996



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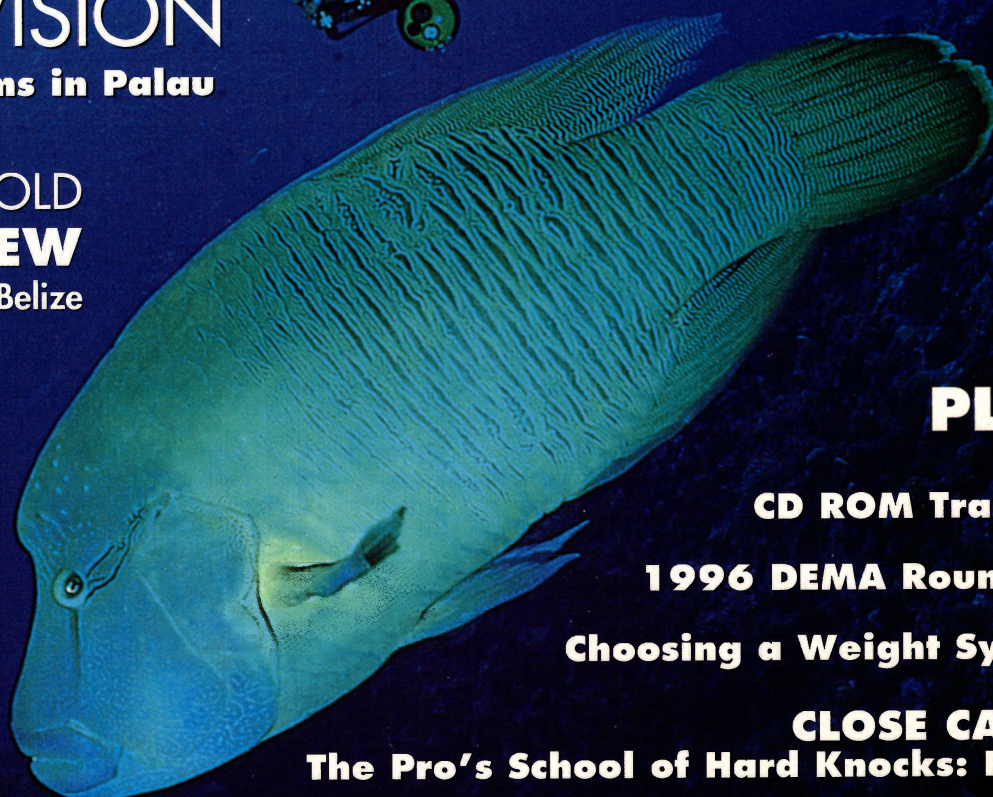
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Borrowed and Blue in Belize

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For Best Diving,
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Listing, Page 98



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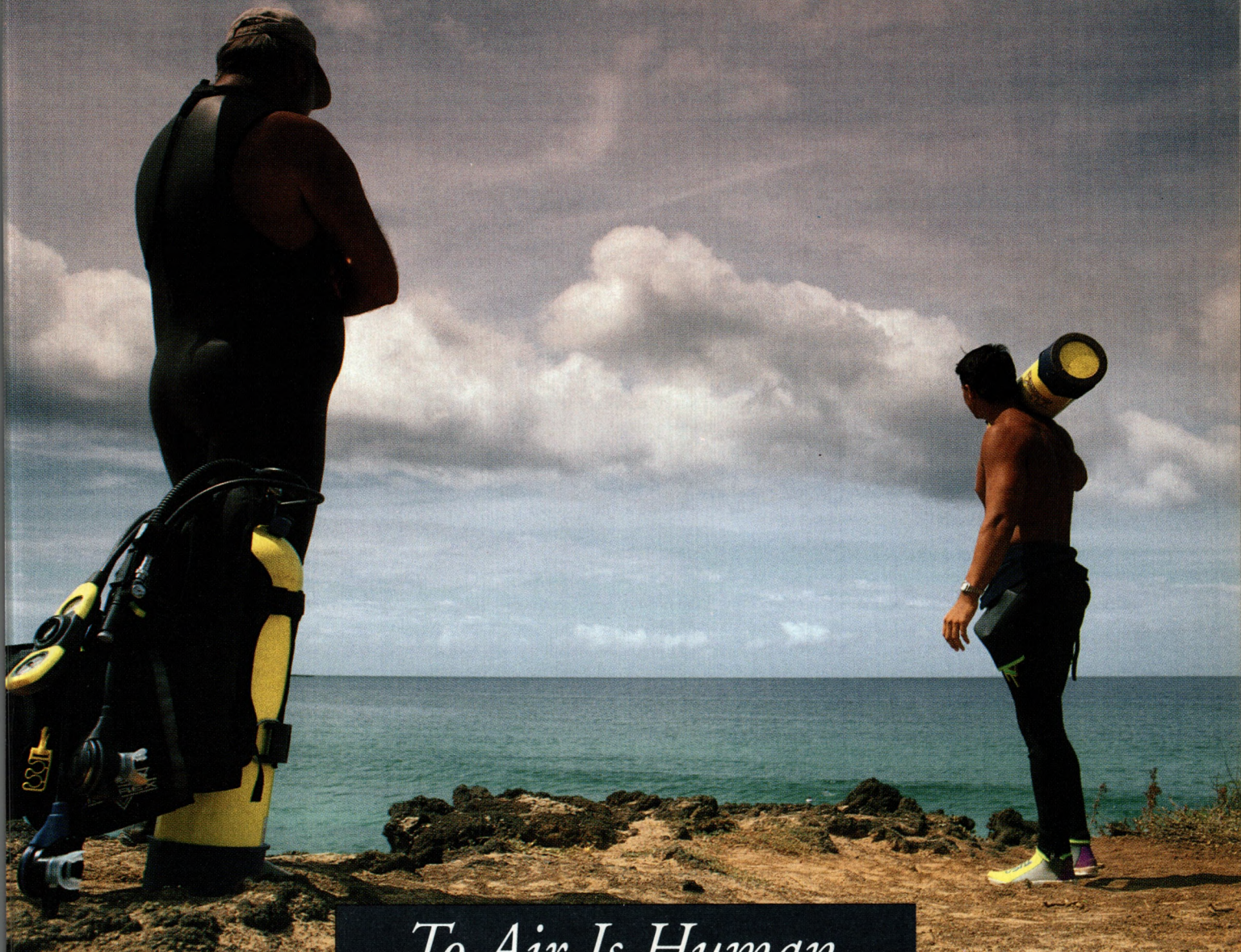
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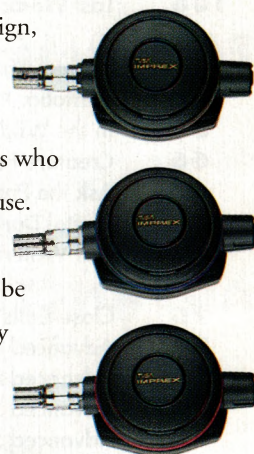


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Organizing a three-week expedition with humpback whales, rebreathers, three liveaboards and *National Geographic* had Editor Fred D. Garth in a full-time panic.
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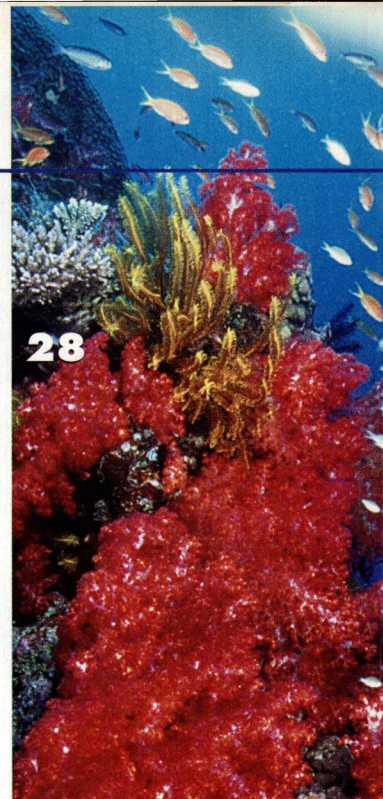
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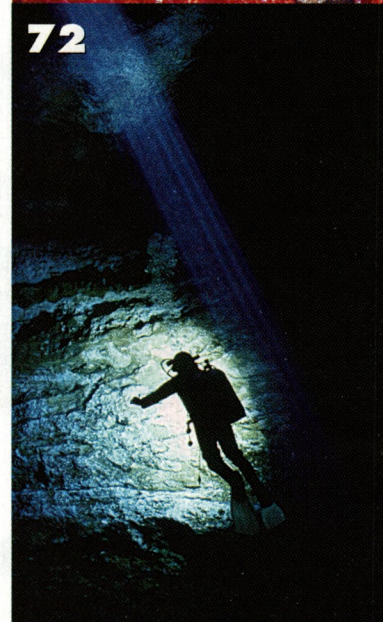
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Cover Shot: Writer/photographer Catherine Castle pursues a Napoleon wrasse for a photographic opportunity in the Blue Hole area of Palau. *Photo by Bret Gilliam.*

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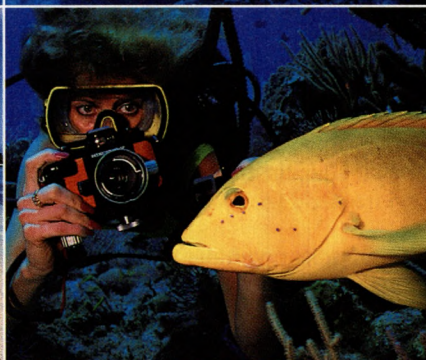
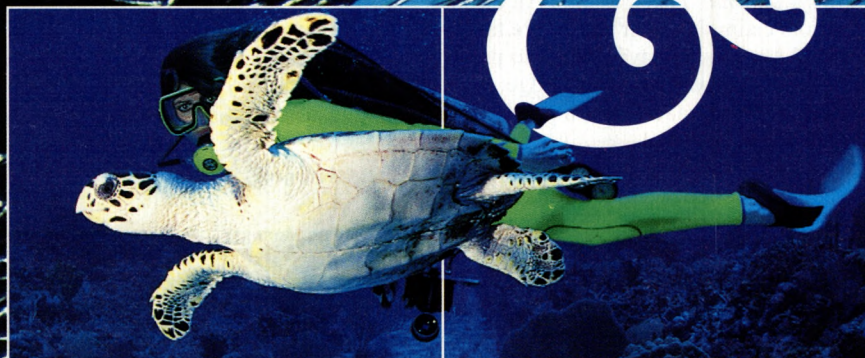


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Garth and Gilliam with National Geographic expedition. Clockwise from left: Peck Euwer, NGE host Boyd Matson, Garth, Gilliam and cinematographer Mike deGruy

photo by Tanya Burnett

whether truth or just a figment of excessive nitrogen, these anecdotes illustrate the myriad of mishaps available in the diving life.

As it turns out, we received so many great stories they spilled over into next issue's ADJ as well. Leading off this issue's special section is a slightly embellished, but no less entertaining (and, in fact, based on fact) piece by Bret Gilliam in which he so eloquently outlines the framework by which this editorial gem was created.

It's quite appropriate that we're publishing these close-call articles during this time of the year, because May is the official Responsible Diver Month (see details, page 12). Not to say that our writers are irresponsible; they just like to ride the razor's edge occasionally. Responsible Diver Month was created several years ago by some true diving visionaries to celebrate safety and awareness in our sport. It also emphasizes responsibility for one's own diving safety. While the buddy system certainly has its virtues, ultimately, divers need to strive to be responsible for themselves. When we attain this goal, we'll all be a lot better off.

Lots of dive stores nationwide will be observing RD Month during May, so it's a great time to visit your favorite dive store, have your equipment checked out and tuned up, and maybe jump into the pool for a quick refresher dive before you face the elements of the great blue.

Speaking of which, I recently fulfilled an appointment with the big blue and big humpback whales in the Silver Bank in the southern Atlantic Ocean (80 miles north of the Dominican Republic). Naturally, just before I departed, I happened to read Doug Perrine's frightful tale (page 82) in which he explains how he was nearly slashed to death by a humpback whale. I managed to escape the dreaded whale slashing but I came close to a few tail thrashings during our three-week expedition in this extraordinary place. Each winter, around 2,000 humpbacks go there to breed and give birth and we were there as well to observe and document. *National Geographic Television* came along to record the event with the host of *National Geographic Explorer*, Boyd Matson. I was promptly demoted from magazine editor to dinghy (not dingy) driver for the film crew (although six days in a rubber boat with the tropical sun beating down can play a nasty tune on the old gray matter). We were attempting to swim in harmony with these awesome creatures while utilizing modern rebreathers. Our luck ran both hot and cold, but that's another story which will premier in the next issue. However, you can get a preview by looking for the *National Geographic Explorer* episode which is scheduled to air on TBS in April. Don't look for me; I just drove the boat.

Finally, for all of you Internet web-heads, *Scuba Times Online* continues to surge in growth. We now have over 350 pages of content covering everything from dive travel and equipment to dive medicine. As a matter of fact, we've added two more doctors, Dr. Charles Sutton and Dr. David Elliot, to our Medical Center for a total of three physicians to answer your pressing questions, of which there has been a downright flurry. Could there be a link (no pun intended) between Internet users and diving hypochondriacs? Hmmm, could be. Additionally, our photo section is getting beefed up and the *STO* look continues to evolve, adding more sizzle and user-friendliness. The propeller heads in our office are drooling over the prospect of another *STO* addition, the Cyber Phone. Instead of speaking over the net via the keyboard, the Cyber Phone will allow actual voice communication through *STO* to anyone in the world. And the beauty is that it's a local call. It's no wonder that AT&T has just jumped into the Internet game.

That's it from here. Enjoy and, remember, be a responsible diver. ■

Fred D. Garth

Fred D. Garth

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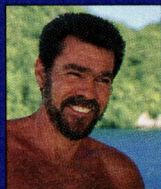
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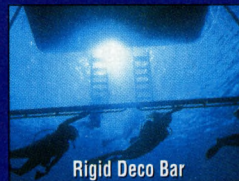
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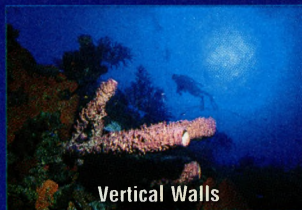


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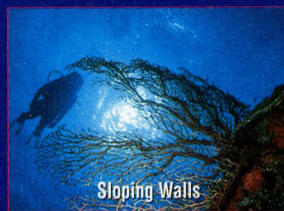
Sea Mounts



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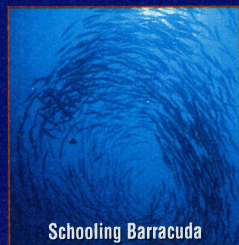
Belize, Central America



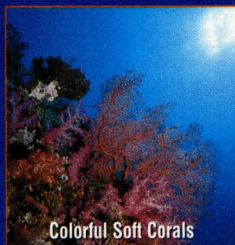
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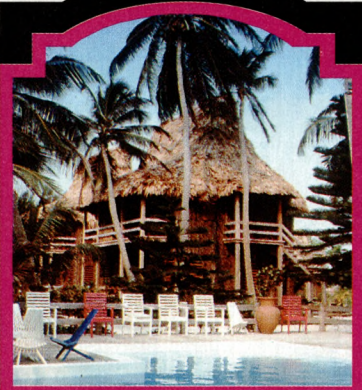
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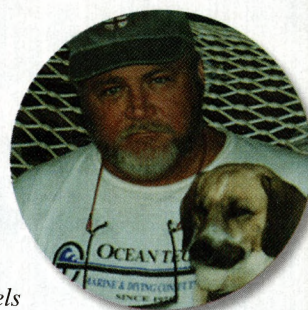
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If the Editor of the *Advanced Diving Journal* **Bret Gilliam** isn't hanging around restaurants drinking mass quantities of California Beaujolais and telling sea stories to Fred Garth (page 76), he's frolicking around in the middle of the night, dancing with whales (that's whales in the ocean, not in the bars). Author of 10 books, including his most recent *The Complete Guide to Caribbean Liveboard Dive Vessels* (published by *Scuba Times*), Bret turned his attention to Pacific liveboards to research his article about Palau (page 16).



College professor and diving officer at California State University at Fullerton, **Eric Hanauer** takes us on a flight with the mantas of Yap (page 18) and has also found the time to write his third book *Diving Micronesia*, which covers the wonders of this area. His other books include *Egyptian Red Sea* and *Diving Pioneers*.

Join award-winning photojournalist **Brandon Cole** and his fiancé **Melissa Singh** as they explore and name new dive sites in the Lau group of Fiji on page 26. Their next adventure takes them into the land of matrimony. Brandon popped the question, and the couple is heading off to the Amazon or some far-off location for the ceremony in the near future. Congratulations and have a happy journey.

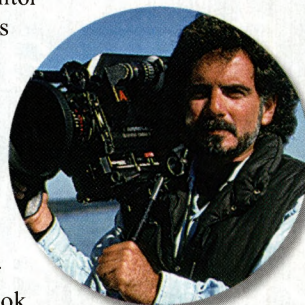


After eating her first clam at age two, **Ellen Sarbone** began her love affair with the sea. Her love for the sea becomes apparent as she investigates the environmental impact of tourism in Costa Rica and also tells us on page 20 about the beauty Costa Rica is trying to protect. Besides being a writer and photographer, Ellen keeps busy with a weekly radio travel show broadcast in California.

Around ten years ago, native Texan **Joe Miller** decided the state just wasn't big enough for him, so he packed his underwater photo gear and moved to Belize - a country the size of Vermont. Three years ago, he founded *Belize Magazine*, which quickly became the preeminent publication about the diverse country. In this issue (page 34), Miller reveals some of his secret sites both above and below water, that he's discovered during the past decade.

Who says you can't teach an old dog a new trick? While writing the article with his wife **Sue** on CD ROM Training, **Dave Millhouser** learned a few new things (either that or the heat from the computer monitor thawed what the New England winter froze). See what this new technology offers on page 45 and also enjoy Dave and Sue's humorous stint about wetsuits on page 106.

If you read the classic *Moby Dick* novel and weren't put on the edge of your seat by its fictional tale, then scoot a little closer to the edge and begin reading page 86 as photographer and filmmaker **Bob Talbot** tells a harrowing real-life tale which becomes a life lesson for all of us. For lighter entertainment, look for Bob's book *Ocean of Light*, available this fall and for his video follow-up to *Dolphins and Orcas* in the near future.



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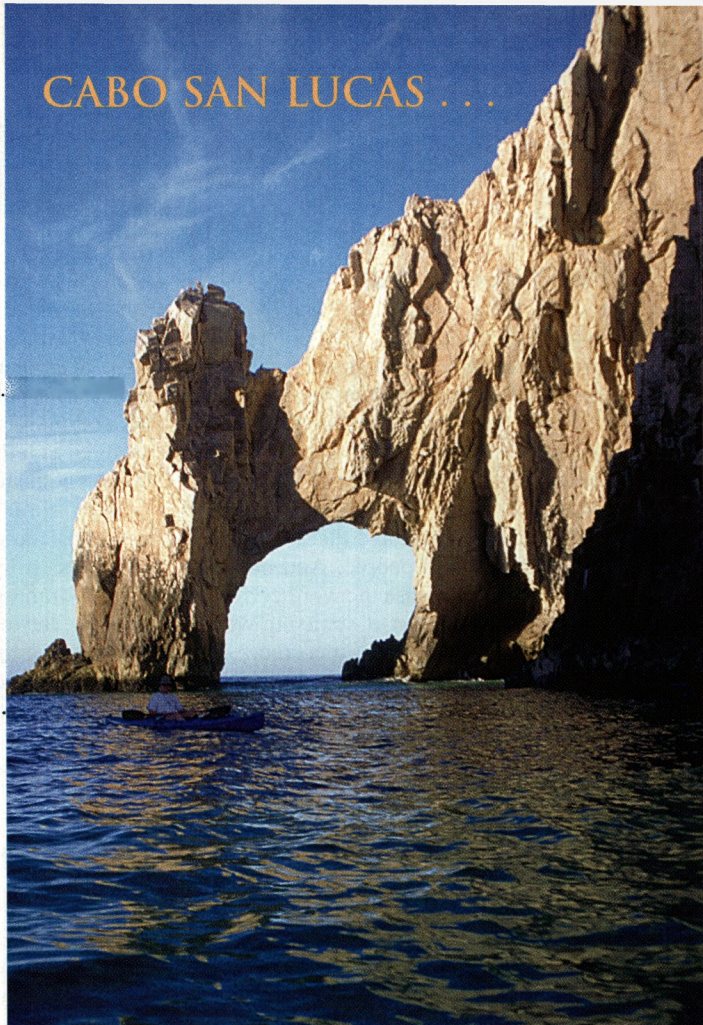
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You Figure it Out

Regarding the February 1996 "Divesuit" issue and Fred's Rip Tide comments, I suppose the photos are politically correct but somewhat boring. Not to insult the photographer as the pictures are superb. Also please note that saying "politically correct" is politically incorrect because saying "politically correct" implies it is political and that may offend some nonpolitical people. And not only that, is it correct to use the word correct as it may not be correct if someone who is nonpolitical feels it is incorrect? The proper thing to say would be, uh—it would be, I guess sort of, well I have no idea what it would be.

Bruce Bowker
Carib Inn
Bonaire

Bruce, thanks for the insight. Just a suggestion though; a few days high up in the mountains where the air is really clean and fresh will do wonders for a severe case of lingering narcosis.

Pleased

I am writing in response to comments made in your February 1996 editorial about the toning down of your divesuit issue.

While Fred Garth tries to justify past dive suit issues by saying "Cosmopolitan and Elle are far racier," We as readers are not subscribing to Cosmopolitan or Elle. Maybe, Mr. Garth, you would understand "the logic of this assault" completely if the tables were turned.

I am pleased to see that Scuba Times has taken a more conservative and realistic approach on the dive suit issue.

As the mother of three young impressionable daughters (one a diver, one just beginning) who enjoy browsing through your pages, I commend you for photographing the models in the dive suits, instead of falling out.

Carol Massetti
McDonald, PA

Helpful Hint

I think Mr. Woosley from Canada might have been pulling your leg in his letter about underwater reading (Feb. 1996, Letters). However, he might be serious about needing information regarding seeing better underwater.

As Mr. Gilliam replied, bifocal prescription lenses for dive masks can be obtained at most dive stores and at some

opticians. Also, there are many adapter kits advertised to facilitate mounting your own everyday glasses in your face mask. I have been using my glasses without the earpieces for about 15 years and have had no complaints. All that is additionally required is a thorough defogging application on both sides of the glasses.

One simple homemade method of mounting the glasses uses a small plastic suction cup inside the face plate. Wire glasses frames with almost any kind of opening between the lenses can be easily pressed over the rear end of the cup. Also, plastic frames can be mounted with a minimum amount of ingenuity.

Irby Hartley
Hixson, TN

Keeping it Local

I hope you continue the Dive America articles. I only plan one international trip (Caymans, Cozumel, etc.) a year but dive locally three times a month once it warms up. We travel up to five hours away from Cincinnati as long as camping and lodging are available.

D. Hudson
Cincinnati, OH

Dive America articles will continue to expand, so look for more about USA diving. Also, dear readers, to help our editors find out about great local diving, please send us info on your favorite backyard dive site. It may be worthy of some ink.

Conscientious

In Dean Wagon's informative article on the yellowline arrow crab (Feb. 1996, Creature Feature), he mentions handling this crab twice. Only once does he suggest the crab was put back in the coral. It should be mentioned that the arrow crab has a relatively small familiar territory. Therefore, divers should be aware that if they pick up one of these wonderfully curious critters, they should not carry it 10 yards away to show others and then just place it back on the reef anywhere. This would be equivalent to a UFO picking up Bubba Diver from his dive boat in the Red Sea and returning him to a dive boat in Lake Victoria. The arrow crab should be returned to the exact place from which it was taken, as is true of many of the ocean's creatures.

Roger Roth
Cincinnati, OH

Dear Abducted by Aliens: You are correct; moving a critter can quickly turn it into a snack. However, we do advocate moving anyone named Bubba Diver from the dive boat into a cage with a sex-crazed alien octopus.

Kudos and Question

Greetings, friend! I absolutely love your web site—one of the nicest scuba sites I've found! I commend you!

And also—how can I subscribe to your fine publication on-line? Do I submit my mailing address to the sales department?

Thanks and have a terrific day.

K. Bell
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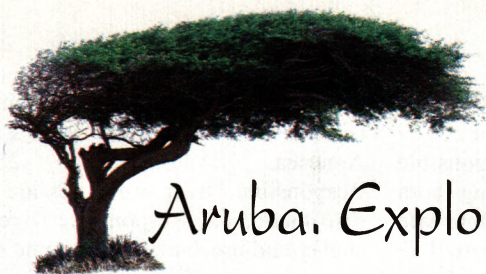
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Hey, Art Guy!

I really enjoy reading the magazine — the overall quality is excellent and it's the little things that help set it apart from the average dive rag. For example, the way you integrate pictures into the stories by not always using sharp edges and rectangular boxes makes the stories more enticing to read. Also, the stand-alone sections *Fathoms Framed* and *ADJ* within the magazine give the feel that one is reading several types of journals, albeit under one cover. Several sittings are usually necessary to fully absorb all of the information presented on the TCF paper. Keep up the good work!

Steven Singer
Northridge, CA

Address letters to Scuba Times Magazine, 14110 Perdido Key Drive, Suite 16, Pensacola, Florida 32507, or contact us via CompuServe at 73241,1037, or the Internet at www.scubatimes.com — Not all letters can be published and may be edited for space and clarity.

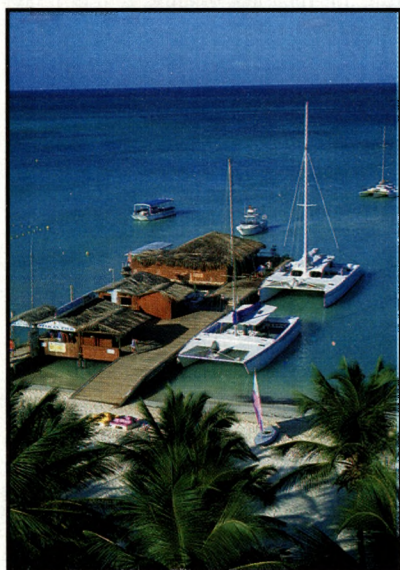


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May is **RESPONSIBLE DIVER**MONTH

The year 1995 will be remembered by many as a tragic one for the diving community. Two well-known diving personalities lost their lives to the sport they loved. World-record cave explorer Sheck Exley died while attempting to break his own record on a 1,000-foot dive in a Mexican cave system. HPNS (High Pressure Nervous Syndrome) was suspected as a complicating factor in his monumental attempt. Equally as tragic was the triple death of Darron Douglass, an editor and writer; his 14-year-old son; and a friend, all of whom died attempting to free an anchor in the cold California waters at 140 feet. Over the years, Douglass had written several articles for *Scuba Times*.

While most divers understand the inherent risks of exploring innerspace, when an experienced diver dies, the safety issue quickly gets shoved to the surface. For all divers, whether new or weathered by hundreds of dives, education and training are the staples of safe diving. Several years ago, with the dual goals of make diving safer and to reduce accidents, some diving visionaries began the Responsible Diver Program. Two years ago, an offshoot of that movement was unveiled as Responsible Diver Month, and May was picked as the lucky month.

This year, May 1996 marks the second annual Responsible Diver Month, which will be celebrated in over 1,000 dive stores across the nation. While May is the

official Responsible Diver Month, many dive stores will be running Responsible

Diver Month promotions during both April and May. In order to promote safe diving and reduce accidents, many dive stores will be offering specials on refresher courses, gear maintenance and inspection. Because spring is that time when many of us put away our snow skis (or snow shovel) and begin our dive season,

Responsible Diver's Code, are being distributed free through dive stores across America. Additionally, 250,000 Responsible Diver brochures are being distributed. The Responsible Diver tank sticker and brochure outline some of diving risks and offer excellent safety information which has been developed by top dive professionals over several years. By getting this message out, the goal is to create an aura of safety among divers.



Look for this banner at your local dive store

April and May are the perfect months to tune up our dive equipment and sharpen our diving skills.

"Responsible Diver Month is the brain child of some of the leaders in diving," said Steve Barsky of the Responsible Diver Committee. "If we can help to reduce diving accidents through risk awareness, training and education, then we're all better off. It's an outstanding cause and we're just happy to see the support growing year by year."

Most divers know that diving is a high-adventure activity that carries some risks. As part of Responsible Diver Month, over 250,000 tank stickers, which carry the

"Safety is a cause that has no natural enemies," said Fred Garth, chairman of the Responsible Diver Month Committee. "This is an effort that everyone in diving can and should support. Saving lives and reducing diving accidents are things we all take very seriously. So far, we're thrilled with the support we've received."

To learn more about Responsible Diver Month and how to be a Responsible Diver, visit your local dive center for your free Responsible Diver tank sticker. While you're there, consider signing up for a refresher course so that your skills will be honed. It's also an excellent time to have all of your diving equipment inspected, such as your BC, regulator and drysuit, along with an annual cylinder VIP. Be sure your equipment and your skills are ready for the upcoming diving season *before* you take the plunge.

The Responsible Diver Month campaign is a non-profit event which is sponsored by the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA), the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America (ORCA) and cylinder manufacturer Luxfer, USA. Its primary intent is to reduce diving accidents through training, education and proper gear inspection.

Stop by your favorite dive store during April and May, pick up a sticker and display it on your tank. Show that you're a safe and responsible diver and ask about Responsible Diver Month. If your dive center is not participating or is unaware of the campaign, they can call ORCA at 303-444-3353 for a free Responsible Diver Promotional Package.

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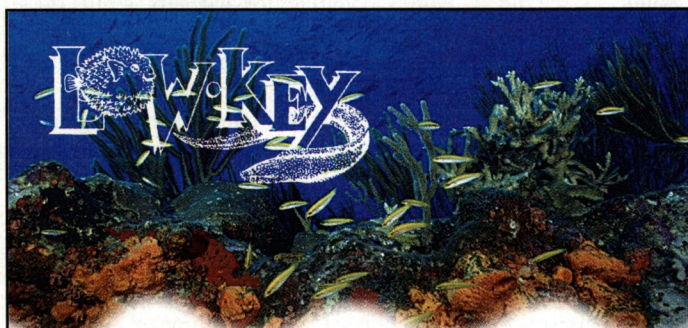
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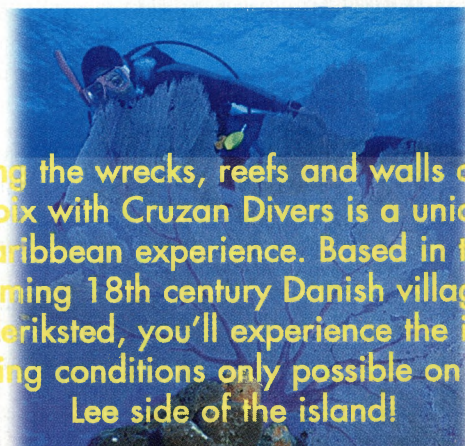
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It was a colossal task, no less monumental than organizing San Francisco's Gay Pride Parade. Let's just say it was humongous. We had chartered three liveaboard dive boats, acquired 18 newly developed rebreathers and had 64 people, including a *National Geographic* film crew, and they were all set on GO. Our mission was a three-week dive expedition with breeding humpback whales on the Silver Bank of the Dominican Republic. For me, it was a project up there with the parting of the Red Sea. And so far, things were progressing smoothly. Until the phone rang. It was Bret Gilliam, one of the trip coordinators.

SHAKIN'

Like a Guppie in a Shark Tank

PART I — BY FRED D. GARTH

"Fred," he said calmly, "we've got trouble."

"What's up?" I asked, expecting nothing more than a gummed-up fetzer valve.

"Well, the rebreathers are still in Germany locked up in customs, all of the gas blending equipment - \$50,000 dollars worth - was stolen and the Dominican Republic has thrown out our permits to dive with the rebreathers, including the one for *National Geographic Television*."

As he spoke, I could feel the life pouring out of me and soaking into the carpet like hot motor oil from a ruptured crankcase. We were only three weeks from departure and six months of work was going up in flames. It's pretty much standard practice for my work day to consist of dousing a few fires of discontent or confusion. But that day, I should have worn my full-body asbestos suit and called in the fire department. Somehow, through my devastation, I grasped a fleeting strand of composure.

"I guess things could be worse," I said with frail optimism. "At least the boats didn't sink."

"I haven't gotten to that part yet," Gilliam said pausing, perhaps waiting to

hear me fall from my chair, and begin beating the floor hysterically. "Just kidding," he said. "The boats are fine."

"You're a sick man," I reminded him. "Thanks. I'm well aware."

Diving with 30-ton humpback whales is nothing short of a religious experience. Quite simply, people's lives are changed and renewed after swimming eyeball to eyeball with one of the planet's largest yet most graceful creatures. It's surreal, yet so real as they float like elegant sea butterflies and cavort around you. It's an experience that people wait their whole lives for and that most people never have a chance to encounter. For those reasons and hundreds more, some that reside in the private catacombs of the mind, this trip became more popular than a lifeboat on the *Titanic*.

It all began in Houston in the summer of 1995. Author, explorer and silver-tongued orator Bret Gilliam presented me with the idea at the annual SeaSpace dive show. We'd throw together a few rebreathers, charter the *Turks & Caicos Aggressor* and co-habitate with 2,000, 60-foot-long leviathans as they bred and gave birth. Sounded simple enough. So, we shook hands, got the

thumbs up from Captain Julie Jordon of the *Turks & Caicos Aggressor* and set our plan in motion. From that first day, it seemed that our telephone rang off the hook. The 110-foot *Aggressor* filled up before you could say Opolousas, Louisiana. So, we added another week. It filled up faster than a rice field during monsoon season. Then we brought in the sleek *Bottom Time II*, a 90-foot catamaran that looks part sea ship, part space ship. In a flash, it seemed, all spaces were taken. Enter our final vessel, the *Ocean Explorer*, a brand new liveaboard built in 1995 especially for long-range expeditions and film crews. It was a perfect addition and the natural housing for the *National Geographic* team.

Even though the phone kept ringing, we had to put on the brakes. This thing was growing too big too fast and had the potential to become unwieldy. Within a week, the boats were full and we had a waiting list of almost 100 people.

With over six months before departure, I was comfortable that everything would fall into place. And, I was only slightly concerned about the rebreathers because Gilliam calmed my nerves. "No problem," Bret said confidently. "Just

leave that to me." That's what scared me.

These hypothetical rebreathers we had heard so much about were being manufactured by Draeger, a company that has been making rebreathers for over 50 years for the German military. So, we had that going for us. Plus, Draeger had just struck a deal with UWATEC USA to distribute these gems to the drooling American diving marketplace. What I didn't know was that they were still in the R and D stages, and actual production was nothing more than a few dates penciled in on some engineer's clipboard somewhere in Dusseldorf.

The humpback whales at the Silver Bank are the same whales that visit Maine in the summer and cruise the oceans of the Western Hemisphere from Brazil to Norway. Each year without fail, from early January through late March, they come to the Silver Bank, an exposed string of coral reefs about 80 miles north of the Dominican Republic. When they first arrive, they breed *and* give birth, to calves that were conceived the prior year. Unlike primates, humpbacks have the ability to mate for the next season, while still pregnant from the prior season. It's a bizarre concept for humans to grasp, but January on the Silver Bank is a cross between an orgy at the Playboy mansion and a midnight run to the maternity ward. Males compete for partners while the females receive life and give life, all at the same time. In the ensuing months, the males begin to leave the immediate area while the mothers nurse their young and introduce them to the brutal world of survival of the fittest.

The Silver Bank falls under the political jurisdiction of the Dominican Republic probably because the DR is the closest land mass. For this reason, the DR controls the permitting of the area. International law prohibits scuba diving with whales, which the DR enforces as best it can. The rumor is that their only patrol boat has been in the boat yard for over a year awaiting repair so on-site enforcement is virtually impossible. However, the DR does keep a record of violators who are reported and will arrest those perpetrators should they ever make the foolish mistake of visiting the DR.

In an effort to protect the whales from an onslaught of whale-crazed divers, the DR has essentially christened a park ranger to monitor activity on the Bank. American Tom Conlin, who for five years served as captain of the liveaboard dive boat *Coral Star* and spent several years leading whale trips, gained both the trust and blessing of the DR officials. His

mission is to maintain law and order at the Silver Bank — kind of a water-bound Matt Dillon. While Conlin may be good at tracking whales, some people question whether someone running competitive charters should also be the rule maker and enforcer. Yet, as ranger designate, Conlin drafted many of the new regulations himself and, in essence, wrote his own job description. Those duties include directing boats to a designated anchorage, inspecting vessels (apparently to sniff out any whale molesting riff raff), giving presentations on "soft whale contact" and "advising" the whale commission on the use of devices such as rebreathers.

While this is all an admirable attempt by the DR to protect an incredibly sensitive area, most of the boats running to the Silver Banks believe that it's impossible for Conlin to be impartial when he's running competing whale trips of his own. Yet, whether it's Conlin or someone else, some controls need to be implemented. Otherwise, the DR may just elect to take the path of least resistance and close the Banks off to everyone.

By August of 1995, still five months before we cast off, we had a letter from the DR granting preliminary approval of our permits. Only the paperwork needed to be completed and our permits would be sent. A month went by and the actual permit document had not arrived. Two and three months passed. Still no permit. It became apparent that communicating with the Dominican Republic was more like dealing with the Banana Republic.

Finally, three weeks prior to our expedition, after 4,372 faxes and 1,398 phone calls, most of which faded into the fuzzy electronics of third-world phone lines, I reached a Latin woman who was a member of the commission and was quite casual about the whole thing.

"Oh," she said matter of factly in her thick accent, "de commission decide no to gib dat permit. We don't hab no diting wit de whales."

Trying desperately to keep my heart from ripping through my rib cage and crashing through my computer screen, I stopped, breathed deeply and screamed like a coyote that had just stepped in a bear trap. Luckily, I'd hit the mute button just prior to my howl. How could I explain to this woman who barely spoke English that we had already spent many thousands of dollars in preparation and that dozens of people had arranged their lives for this expedition? And, how could I make her comprehend that *National Geographic Television* was planning to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 90



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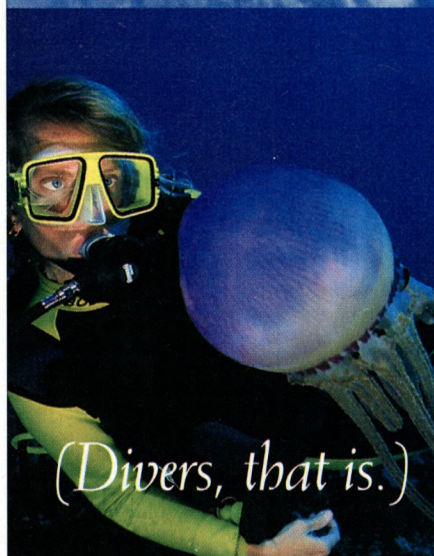
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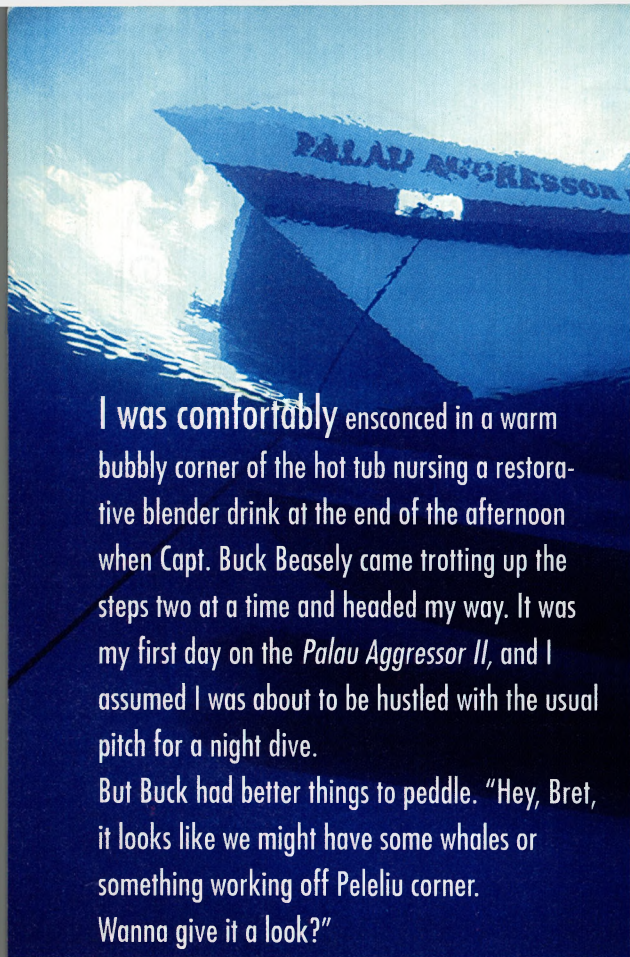
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I was comfortably ensconced in a warm bubbly corner of the hot tub nursing a restorative blender drink at the end of the afternoon when Capt. Buck Beasley came trotting up the steps two at a time and headed my way. It was my first day on the *Palau Aggressor II*, and I assumed I was about to be hustled with the usual pitch for a night dive.

But Buck had better things to peddle. "Hey, Bret, it looks like we might have some whales or something working off Peleliu corner. Wanna give it a look?"

While night dives became pretty routine for me about mid-way through the 1970's, whales have always stirred me from whatever lassitude I may have drifted. The operative phrase here however was "whales or something." And that still needed a bit of clarification from Buck before I relinquished my strategic position next to the pretty blonde with her own personal water jet and recurrent giggle.

"A big something, maybe two. Dolphins, or whales, maybe," Buck reported.

Now, I've seen my fair share of apparitions. I've raced after a distant dolphin that turned out to be a Clorox bottle bobbing in the swells. And I had a Rastafarian neighbor in St. Croix who swears he saw the image of Haile Salassie appear on a screen door one

sultry summer day in the Virgin Islands. But then again, with disturbing frequency, he also conjured up visions of Mr. Rogers serving him chocolate chip cookies. So, call me a skeptic. Nestled in the gurgling tub with a fine view of my own personal Minnehaha, I wasn't in a big hurry to go off on a wild goose chase.

But then I noted Buck sliding away to scoop up his own camera gear, and I knew that he had given credence to the guests' reports. So I heaved myself out of the soothing warm water and made a bee line for the dive deck just in time to scramble aboard the departing launch with a dozen other eager souls.

Buck hit the throttles, and we fairly flew across the calm sea in the direction of the splashy disturbances about a mile off the island. No question, it was marine mammal activity evidenced by the low spouts and occasional uplifted tail flukes. As we drew closer, nearly a dozen adult false killer whales could easily be seen rolling in the easy swell.

Gui Garcia, the *Aggressor's* photo pro, and I eased in as the launch stopped about fifty yards ahead of the whales. The ocean was alive with whistles and clicks and other high-pitched conversations from our cetacean partners. They quickly swam into view, a frenzied bundle of energy intent on some purpose known only to them. But our presence immediately attracted the attention of the two leaders, who cranked a power turn and came over to eyeball us from less than five feet before disappearing in the deep blue.

By now the rest of the dive group

had caught up with us and floated around on the surface hoping to catch a glimpse of the pod. Gui and I snatched a few quick breaths and free dove to about 30 feet and were surrounded by slate gray torpedo shapes that hurtled past us like thunderbolts from Poseidon.

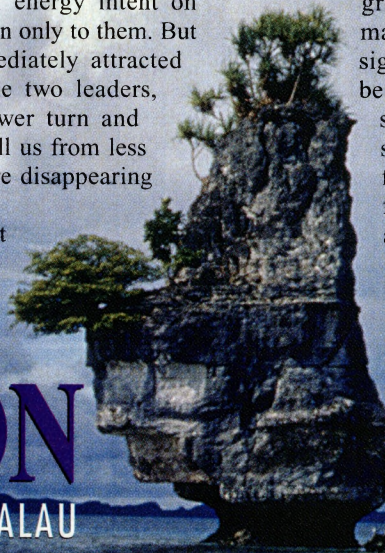
I was forced back to the surface for some renewing oxygen while my newfound friends abandoned me. I paddled with the other guests in the last rays of the setting sun while we drifted in the swift current farther from the island.

A couple from Chicago asked Gui whether they might see sharks out here in the open sea. He put on his best dive guide look of assurance, "Oh no, there's not much out here to interest them." Right, and you'll never see cows on a dairy farm.

Then right on cue, the big male whale led his pod back into our group chirping merrily at the excited snorkelers. Gui and I both pumped up and dove beneath the group to try to capture some film in the fading twilight. Almost immediately, the leader emerged again from the blue-black depths, this time holding about a three-foot long blue runner in his mouth. He was shaking it like a giant Labrador retriever with a rawhide bone, all the while spouting bubbles from his blow hole in triumph.

Like a proud Sunday fly fisherman, the whale paraded his catch past Gui and me, and we offered the equivalent of polite applause with a few toots from our snorkels. But in the whale's excited head bobbing and shaking, the fish was rapidly coming apart. In his wake streamed an ever-growing trail of fragrant chum. Suddenly Gui made a decidedly different signal from the depths beside me, and I turned to see at least two dozen sharks rising to dine on the fresh sushi our whale friend had littered all around us.

Discretion being the better part of valor, we beat a fast retreat to the surface where the rest of



NIGHT VISION

PURSuing PHANTOMS IN PALAU

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BRET GILLIAM



our intrepid explorers were less than happy to welcome us since most of the sharks decided to follow our ascent. The Chicago couple with prior shark anxiety fixed Gui with a withering look that confirmed no tip loomed in his future. But Buck maneuvered the launch quickly into position and suppressed his own mirth as the guests leaped in like salmon climbing a waterfall. Muttering something about spawning and dying, Buck counted heads and headed us back for dinner.

Any lingering doubts about sympathy from the crew were quickly erased by reading the inscription on Capt. Buck's tee shirt: "If you die, we split your gear!"

It's that way on liveaboards. A certain zaniness that goes with the superior diversified diving offered. The crew is there because they like to dive as much as the guests and their enthusiasm is infectious. The Palau Aggressor II is one of the world's top diving vessels and offers more diving in two days than most land based resorts can muster in a week.

It's not just the quantity of diving, it's the quality and the ease of access that has made liveboard diving the informed choice of so many divers. There's just no beating the convenience of unpacking your dive bag once and then never moving your gear again for a week or more while the crew serves up a smorgasbord of dive sites and experiences that conventional resorts simply cannot come close to matching. I mean, Palau is damn good by any measure, but from a state-of-the-art vessel it's simply delicious.

Consider that one day we dove Blue Corner and the adjacent Blue Holes four times! And that our total transit time was less than fifteen minutes from the mother ship. Or the day we visited

Big Drop, Blue Corner and Peleliu Corner. . . all before lunch! Yeah, Palau by liveboard is one of the best experiences in a region where superlatives are accepted as the norm.

Buck and his counterpart Capt. Shelly Acuff provided a wealth of diving during the two weeks I spent aboard. And in spite of spending nearly a month in Palau the year before, I was surprised to be introduced to new sites daily. That's the mark of a crew who goes the extra mile and continues to expand their repertoire to keep repeat customers thrilled.

Sandwiched between my two weeks on the *Aggressor* was a ten day voyage on Peter Hughes' *Sundancer* that spanned the Palauan island chain from the northern Kayangle atoll and remote Ngeruangle Reef to Angaur, home of wild monkeys, in the south.

Capt. Louis Usie pioneered trips to Kayangle, an area that was largely unvisited by non-native vessels until 1995. The diving is wild and still being discovered and each day offered virgin opportunities on both shallow coral gardens and steep drop offs. The western edge of the reefs often featured visibility that was essentially unlimited, in

Interior of Blue Hole's cave.

Inset: Entrance to Blue Hole's caves.

Opposite top: *Palau Aggressor II* at anchor.

Opposite bottom: Rock Island's spire.

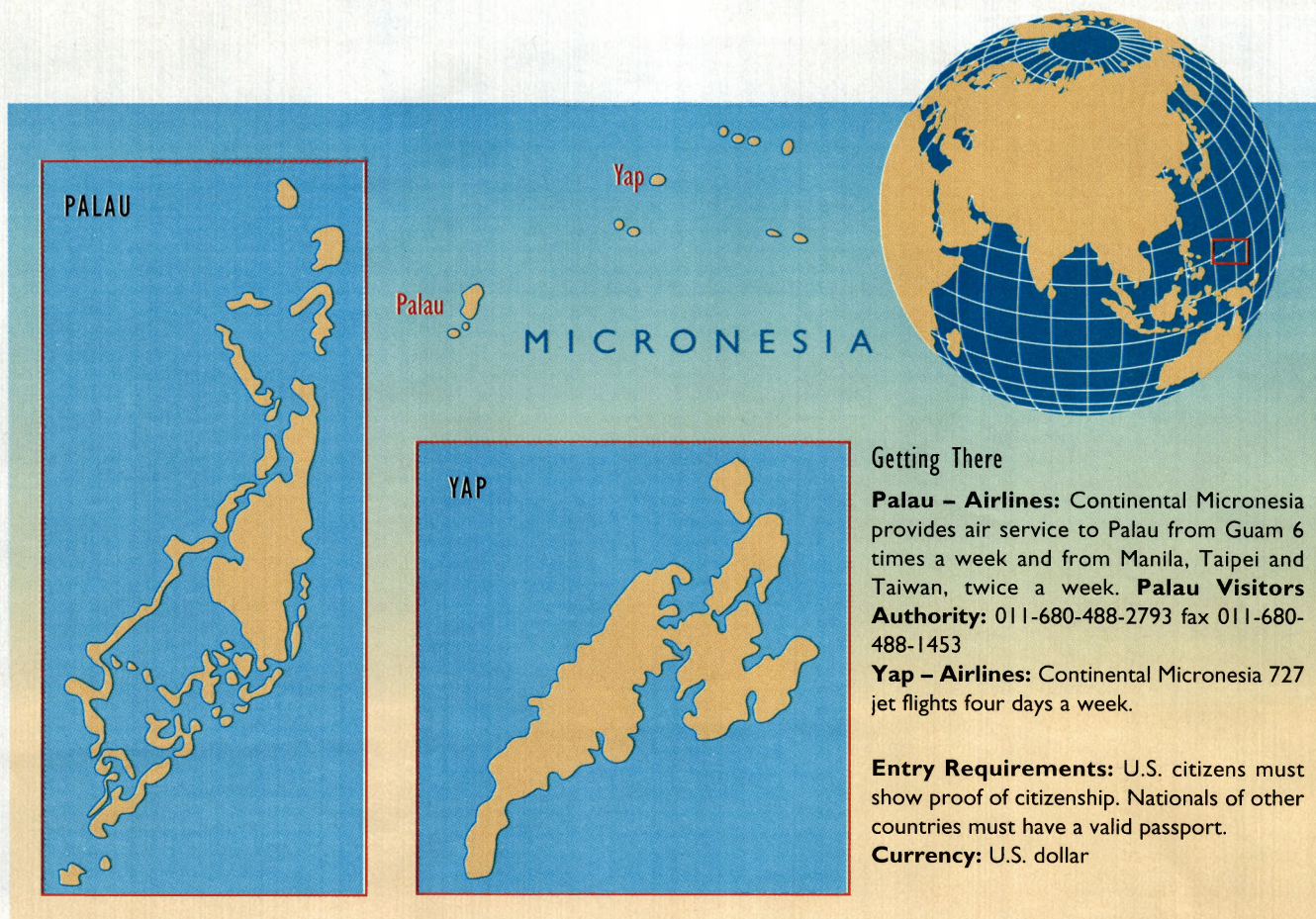
excess of 200 feet or more, along with a robust population of reef sharks that patrolled the passes.

Louis and chief dive master Frank Ladner are continually locating new sites and treated us to some fabulous walls that began as shallow as ten feet and plunged dramatically to bottomless depths. The wall faces were festooned with colossal sea fans and profusions of colorful soft corals nourished by the ever-present currents that swept fresh nutrients their way.

The beauty of the small islands located inside the atoll is reminiscent of any South Sea Michener novel. Only a handful of native Palauans make their home in these remote outposts, and Capt. Louis has negotiated directly with the local chiefs for visitation privileges. It's an interesting contrast to observe the ultra-modern liveboard swinging on a mooring while fisherman wave in passing from dugout canoes powered by crudely hewn masts and patchwork sails.

But the two civilizations manage to peacefully co-exist in something of a time warp that I'm grateful to observe from the first class dining deck over a glass of excellent Merlot while wrapped in one of Peter Hughes' luxu-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21



Getting There

Palau – Airlines: Continental Micronesia provides air service to Palau from Guam 6 times a week and from Manila, Taipei and Taiwan, twice a week. **Palau Visitors Authority:** 011-680-488-2793 fax 011-680-488-1453

Yap – Airlines: Continental Micronesia 727 jet flights four days a week.

Entry Requirements: U.S. citizens must show proof of citizenship. Nationals of other countries must have a valid passport.

Currency: U.S. dollar

ISLAND OF THE MANTAS

YAP – MICRONESIA'S TIME CAPSULE

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC HANAUER

Ten years ago, few divers had heard of Yap. Today it joins Palau and Truk as one of Micronesia's Big Three, renowned for opportunities to get up close and personal with manta rays. If you need great manta pictures to round out your portfolio, this is the place to go. But there's more. Outside Yap's barrier reef are pristine walls with 150 foot visibility. The jungle islands are home to the most traditional society in Micronesia, where women go bare breasted and giant stone disks are used for money. It's a peaceful retreat to a time gone by, a chance to see Micronesia as it was before war and high-density tourism changed it forever.

A fortuitous combination of channels in the barrier reef and weather pat-

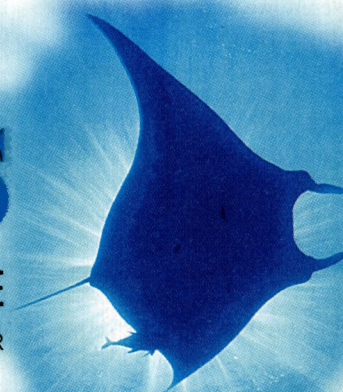
terns allow diving with mantas all year round. The animals move regularly into two of these channels for feeding and cleaning, one on the east side and one on the west. Tradewinds blow from May to November, making the west side of the reef, Mil Channel, diveable. From June through October, the best diving is on the eastern side, at Goofnuw (pronounced Gawf new) Channel.

On days when you hit it right, Mil Channel can be pristine with visibility in the 100 foot range. The rays gather at a 25-foot ledge called Manta Ridge. Divers hang on to the rocks there while the animals cruise overhead. Although visibility isn't as good at Goofnuw, this channel has some unique advantages.

Mantas spread out over five distinct spots, so divers can get away from one another. Also, many whitetip sharks hang out on the sandy bottom of the channel.

Because mantas move in during tidal changes, dives are scheduled accordingly. As the tide begins to turn, plankton is funneled out of the mangrove areas, and the mantas become active, hovering very happily with tons and tons of water bringing them food. At the end of the incoming tide, currents are slack enough for divers to join them.

Guests are not allowed to touch the mantas or interfere with their movements in any way. This is the reason for the animals' natural behavior. They don't seem to care how many people



are around as long as the people stay down and don't chase them. At first there were only three or four distinct coral heads in Goofnuw Channel where mantas could be encountered. Now, even in the sandy center of the channel, some mantas will fly directly overhead, close enough to reach up and touch. It helps to hold your breath momentarily as they pass; most of them don't like bubbles.

Late November through March is a dramatic time of year in Mil Channel. It's mating season. The mantas form a procession, with one female leading up to 15 males. Whatever she does, the others follow.

Guides have identified over 40 individual mantas by the distinctive patterns on their underside and have given them names like Spike, Angel, Blitz, and Gecko. Any guest who discovers a new one will have the opportunity to name it.

Headquarters for divers on Yap is the 23-room Manta Ray Bay Hotel. Owned by Bill Acker, a former Peace Corps volunteer who started sport diving operations on the island, it serves as the social center as well. Acker's goal is to make this the most personable dive resort that exists in this part of the world.

In a way, Acker is a victim of his own success. For divers, the mantas overshadow everything else about Yap, but Bill works hard to promote the dive sites outside the reef. There are several excellent ones, including Lionfish Wall, Yap Caverns, Sunrise Reef, Land's End, and Magic Kingdom. Visibility outside the barrier reef is always over 100 feet, corals are pristine, and because no harassment or feeding is allowed, marine animals act naturally. So even if the mantas aren't there on schedule, there is plenty of fine diving.

Topside, Yap is possibly the most unspoiled state in Micronesia. Time doesn't stand still for any people, but Yapese have resisted many of the influences of modern society. The easy pace of life is a throwback to the days when these western Pacific islands were considered an earthly paradise.

Yap is known as the Island of Stone Money. Huge, carved disks of limestone can be found along the roadside,

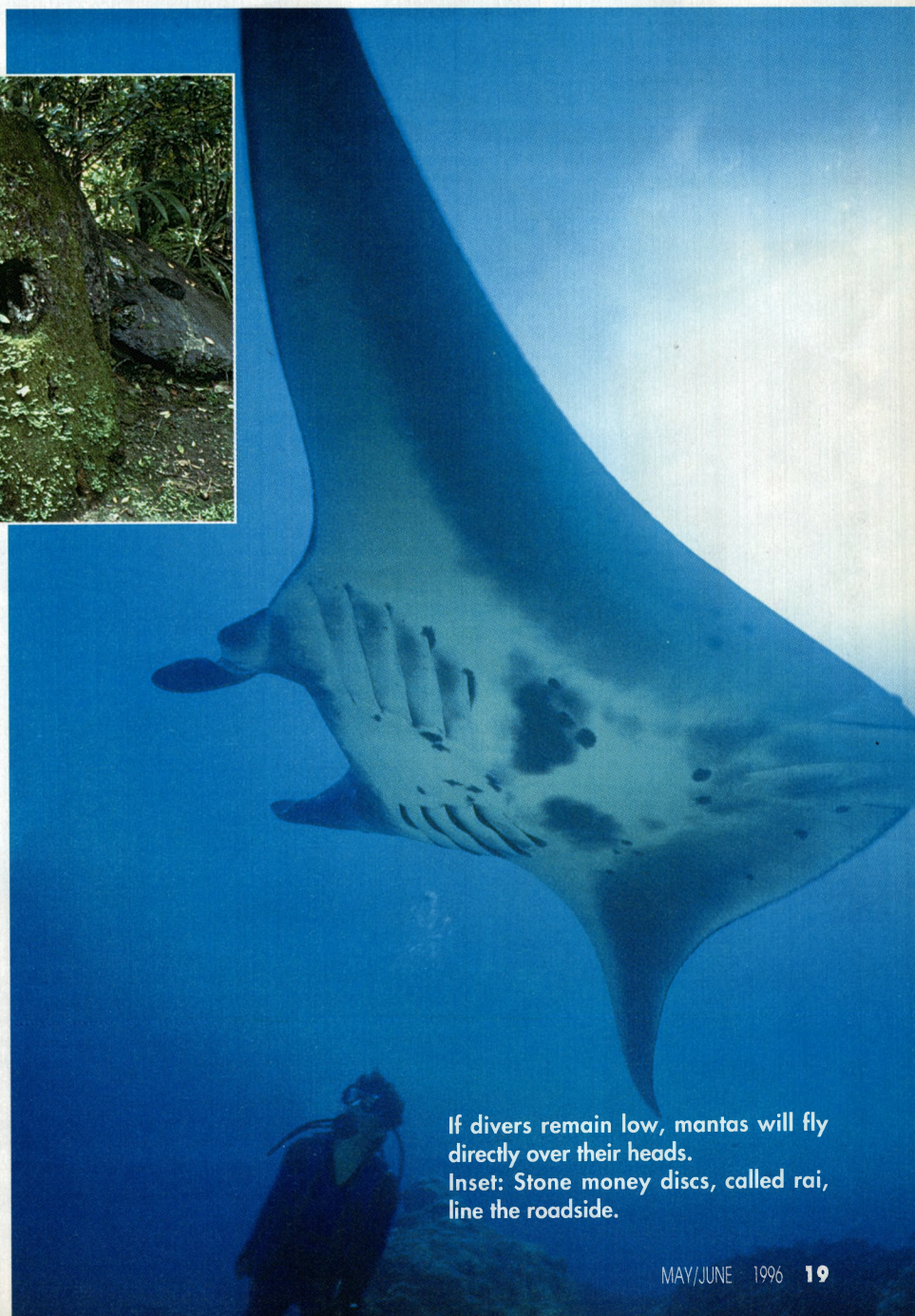
next to ceremonial meeting houses, or in jungle clearings called stone money banks. These disks, called rai, range from two to twelve feet in diameter; approximately 7,000 still remain.

Each has a specific owner, although it may be located far from his home. Value is determined not by size, but by its history. All stone money was carved with primitive tools from crystalline limestone, quarried only on certain Rock Islands of Palau. It was then transported by canoe across 250 miles of open ocean. Rai that came over on particularly hazardous journeys have greater value. With the coming of the 20th century, the practice of making stone money ended. It is used now to pay societal debts, such as wedding dowries or reparations, as well as

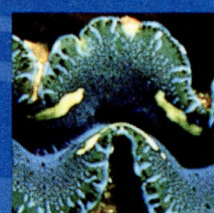
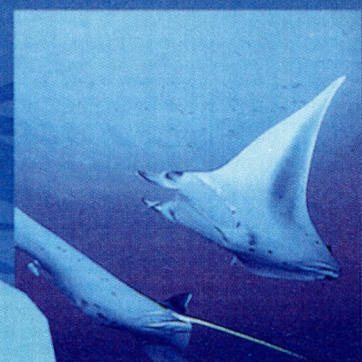
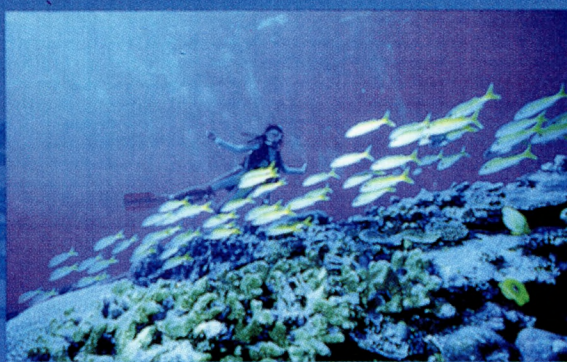
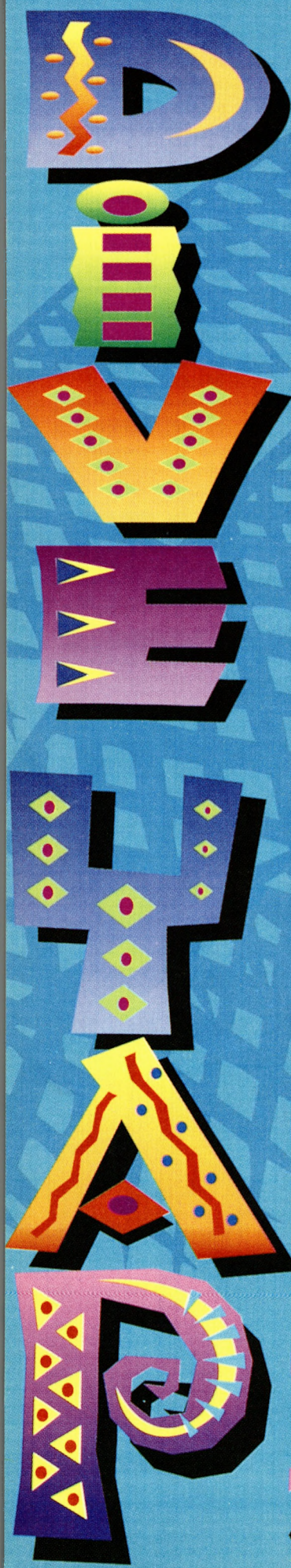
collateral for loans.

Many divers come to Yap on the way to Truk or Palau, staying only long enough to dive with mantas. This is a mistake because both topside and underwater, this Island of the Mantas has many things to offer a patient, appreciative visitor. Although some 30 sites are dived regularly, there are still places to be discovered. This, too, is part of the appeal of Yap: the chance that you may be the first to dive a new site. Combined with the relaxed ambiance of the western Pacific the way it used to be, these factors make Yap one of the true delights of Micronesia. ■

Eric Hanauer recently authored Diving Micronesia which will be available later this year.



If divers remain low, mantas will fly directly over their heads.
Inset: Stone money discs, called rai, line the roadside.



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MANTA RIDGE

MI'L CHANNEL

FORBIDDEN ZONE

SUNRISE REEFS

CHOQOL MINI WALL

SHARK'S REST

VALLEY OF THE RAYS

GOOFNUY MINI WALL

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Palau Top Ten Dive Sites

1 Blue Corner, off the western shore of Ngemelis, put Palau on the map years ago and continues to thrill divers who settle on the top of the drop off and then take in the "sensory overload" show as thousands of schooling fish and hundreds of sharks swim by.

2 New Drop is a perfect complement to Blue Corner, being only a mile or so south. The wall begins as shallow as 20 feet and is nearly vertical. The wall allows a fine view of big sharks and pelagics cruising in and out of the dense fish schools.

3 Big Drop is basically the eastern side of Ngemelis. The wall begins as shallow as two feet and plunges vertically. This is a rare drop-off face that is actually better in the first two fathoms than deeper. The upper reef is simply alive with psychedelic fans and soft corals all living happily in an intricate reef structure.

4 Ngerchong Wall can't always be dived if the sea conditions aren't favorable, but catching it on an in-coming tide when visibility hits 200 feet or so is pure magic. The coral gardens are some of the best developed in Micronesia.

5 Blue Holes is a long stone's throw from Blue Corner and consists of four vertical shafts in the reef top that all connect into a massive cavern room nearly 300 feet across at a depth of 110 feet.

6 Siaes Tunnel is cut into the vertical wall as a giant cavern shaft large enough for two passenger trains. The main entrance at 100 feet is extensively ornamented with growth. Pelagics abound at both exits.

7 Angaur is generally the southernmost island visited. The eastern shore features coral gardens that are the best for variety and size. The pristine condition of these reefs reflects the remoteness of Angaur.

8 Peleliu Corner rivals Blue Corner in high-voltage shark sightings where the currents converge on the island's south point. Almost anything is likely to happen by from big pelagics, giant barracuda schools, mantas or whales.

9 Ulong Channel begins from the ocean wall before the current spills the divers into a wide channel that can carry them a mile or more through spectacular coral formations, some towering up to forty feet. Sand valleys separate the channel into three distinct reef zones which are alive with Pacific tropicals.

10 Chandelier Cave is usually done the last day since it's only minutes from the dock. The entrance is neatly hidden under the jungle growth of the limestone shore, but once underwater, divers swim through a 20 foot wide hole to enter the large cave systems that penetrate extensively under the island. Magnificent stalactite formations, nearly 25 feet long, hang from the ceilings. The caves feature several large air chambers where the diver can surface and breathe normally for animated conversations.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

rious trademark terry robes. The *Sundancer's* gourmet chef emerges from the galley with seafood crepes and hands me a steaming tray to munch before dinner. It's selfless dedication like this to the wilderness ethic that got me elected to the Explorers Club. Well, maybe not exactly.

After a few days in the north, we cruised back to sample some intriguing Japanese wrecks sunk during the fierce battles of World War II. Although Micronesian neighbor Truk (Chuuk) usually steals the limelight for wreck diving, Palau can give some honest competition with the freighter *Teshio Maru* and a big tanker, the *Iro*, sunk adjacent to the lovely Rock Islands.

Frank has saved another new spot to show off near Ngemelis. It's another blue hole that features a narrow oval opening cut into the solid coral in less than three feet of water, practically in the surf zone about two miles south of Blue Corner. The passage quickly opens into a massive cavern that exits to the sheer drop-off around 130 feet. The wall is an explosion of soft corals, fans, and tropical fish by the thousands.

As the *Sundancer* anchors in the glassy sunset over Palau's scores of tiny islets, the *Aggressor* pulls in to share this same protected harbor where the *Ocean Hunter* sought shelter the night before. We are hours from the nearest hotel or other remnant of civilization. But aboard both vessels, each guest knows that sunrise will bring yet another series of truly world-class diving adventures. And all only minutes from the air conditioned comfort of a world-class liveaboard. ▀

Special thanks to Capt. Buck Beasley & the Palau Aggressor II crew; Capt. Louis Usie & the Sundancer crew; and my favorite dive master in the whole world, Frank Ladner. A special appreciation to Continental Micronesia. And Cathryn Castle, model and camera assistant extraordinaire.

Bret Gilliam recently authored The Complete Guide to Caribbean Liveaboard Dive Vessels available through Scuba Times Magazine and dive stores everywhere.

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Inset: Tropical rainforests are being destroyed at an alarming rate to make room for crops and cattle. Because the soil is nutrient-poor, land destroyed for such slash-and-burn agriculture can only sustain crops for a few years.

COSTA RICA

STRUGGLES TO
SAVE ITS FRAGILE
ECOSYSTEM WHILE
EXPANDING ITS
ECONOMY

BALANCING ACT

TEXT BY ELLEN SARBONE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NORBERT WU

Four centuries ago, the Spanish named Costa Rica but quickly lost interest in the "rich coast" because it was void of the precious gold they sought. Today, both locals and tourists have rediscovered the country's natural resources that have marked it as one of the world's most popular ecotourism destinations. However, with tourism almost doubling annually and industrial development increasing, some fear Costa Rica's natural wonders, both above and below water, will become lost, leaving the land truly void of riches.

Burgeoning with an incredible diversity of endemic plant and animal life and a constant flow of migrating birds, the remarkable rainforests, 34 national parks, plentiful private wildlife refuges and biological reserves support more species of birds than both the U.S. and Canada combined; in addition, more species of butterflies inhabit the

country of Costa Rica than on the entire African continent. These natural riches attract a multitude of tourists each year. For instance, some parks recorded a 500 percent increase between 1989 and 1992. This influx of tourists begins to leave its mark on the country's natural habitats. The local government must sift through the dilemma of continuing to develop its tourism market while preserving the area's natural splendor.

In addition to an increase in tourists, the agricultural development of native Costa Ricans (called Ticos) has scarred the countryside. Economic development has led to clear-cutting forests for logging and farming. Farmers found that raising crops proved difficult because the thin rainforest soil could not readily support agriculture. So farmers often tried unsuccessfully to grow crops, then moved on to search

for stable land. In the process, they destroyed more and more of the natural resources.

While the boom in tourism and the agricultural development of Costa Rica have threatened many species of flora and fauna and endangered habitats, good news appears on the horizon. Moving to the forefront of conservation, Costa Ricans have taken a hard look at the value of their natural resources and have launched a strong awareness campaign. The government has also implemented new policies to protect rainforests and parks.

An Environmental Education and Ecotourism Program spreads the message of conservation to students, tourists and communities. Many groups throughout Costa Rica, starting with the country's new president, José Maria



Figuéras Olsen, preach the gospel of "sustainable development" - co-existing in harmony with conservation and "adjusting human activities to the limits imposed by nature." Elected in 1994, Figuéras campaigned on environmental issues. Although Figuéras seems to be committed to protecting major natural habitats, policies are sometimes difficult to implement. For instance, in 1994, park entrance fees for tourists were raised from \$1.25 to \$15.00 as a way to provide much-needed operating funds for the parks. However, the lack of automation in more remote areas raises the question of how much money actually has found its way into the bank.

Ginny Constance, President of Progressive Public Relations, Costa Rica specialists, hopes that the new president and tourism minister will correct excesses of the past, like the construction of the controversial Playa Tambor resort development project and the failure to prevent building within a forbidden zone along the beautiful beaches of Guanacaste. In fact, overbuilding on the whole Pacific coast of Costa Rica has damaged once-pristine bays like the Gulf of Papagayo and has endangered the turtle populations that nest along this coast. Natural disasters have also taken their toll. On the eastern shore, near Limon, a large section of the country's only coral reef died when it lifted six feet out of the water in the earthquake of 1991.

The new government is faced with several issues that present conflict between the country's economical development and its ecological preservation. For example, extending roads into areas previously inaccessible by vehicle helps the local economy and provides jobs, but it also adds to overpopulation and concomitant ecosystem problems. Until 1993, the banana industry was the number one income producer for the country. But runoff from the banana industry pollutes many rivers, killing fish and flora, which reverberates up the food chain.

Tourism, now surpassing the banana industry as the number one income producer, magnifies the dilemma for a government whose responsibili-

ty is to increase the country's economic growth while trying to save its fragile ecosystems. As Chris Baker, author of *The Costa Rica Handbook* said, "Costa Rica is well aware of the issues that are at stake in maintaining tourism growth. The current administration is moving well toward a balance, but this could be temporary if a new regime should come to power without the same commitment to the environment."

Along with the new administration's educational programs, Ticos living in and near parks and reserves are learning from private businesses by participating in the local tourism industry and preserving natural resources. Examples of the benefits abound: Tomás Pozuelo, owner of Temptress Cruises was one of the first to start training locals like Antonio at Caletas as guides. Buying supplies and support services from locals when his ship visited, Pozuelo further boosted the local economy. Other locals have found employment within tourism, further decreasing the impact of farming and fishing on a mass scale.

Cocos Island, synonymous with isolated, wild, big-animal diving, presents a typical conundrum in the tourism-versus-ecology question. Because of its distance from the mainland, only two live-aboards, *Okeanos Aggressor* (18 passengers) and *Undersea Hunter* (14 passengers) dove it from 1990 until 1995 when

they were joined by the latter's sister ship *Sea Hunter* (16 passengers) and sometimes by a special charter on *Temptress* (up to 30 passengers). You don't have to be a mathematician to figure the vast increase in divers in only six years.

Although divers are taken out in smaller skiffs and therefore, split among the numerous dive sites, there is still a large impact on the area. When I was at Cocos, three liveaboards were there for a few overlapping days. Add the sport fishing vessels and the foreign long-line fishing boats that can't seem to be controlled (see accompanying story, page 26), and you have to wonder how long it will take for Cocos Island to show significant degradation.

Diving in Costa Rica is right up there in the top echelon of "wild" dive destinations. Wild because conditions can change from dive to dive and sometimes from minute to minute — visibility varies from 20 to 80 feet, depending upon the amount of plankton or runoff. Wild because of the concussive currents, strong surge and tall tides. Wild because waterfall-bejeweled Cocos Island, about 300 miles and 36 hours by boat from the mainland is in the line of the Humbolt current that also passes the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador and Malpelo in Columbia,

bringing with it some of the biggest, wildest, waterborne animals around —schools of hammerhead and white-tipped reef sharks, giant manta rays with 10-foot wing spans, smaller mobula rays, dolphins, turtles, astonishing sailfish and the unusual red-



Clockwise: The venomous eyelash viper of the tropical rainforest grows to a maximum length of 12 inches. A hummingbird around the cloud forest reserve of Monteverde. The male spotted trunkfish is named for its hard plated body. Cocos Island is renowned for its huge gatherings of sharks. Here, reef whitetip sharks rest in a cave.

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lipped batfish. Wild because you may see a humpback whale migrating from Alaska, or catch a glimpse of the largest fish in the ocean — the elusive whale shark — attracted to its favorite meal, plankton.

Costa Rica has more to offer divers than Cocos Island. Several other diving spots and ecotourist attractions abound. Plus it is so compact that it's exceedingly easy to combine vacation options that would otherwise require separate trips. In two weeks, I spent one week on a live-aboard, visited Tortuguero National Park on the northeast coast, spent a day exploring San Jose's many museums, dove the northwest Pacific coast off Guanacaste Province and experienced diving the Bat Island from the land-based resort El Ocotol.

While on the liveaboard, I dove Isla Salera, a large rocky outcropping near Mañuel Antonio. There I saw a medium-sized turtle, banded eel, plentiful puffers and parrotfish. Next, we visited Caño Island, where landlubbers hiked to the top to explore the remains of a mysterious pre-Columbian civilization that left unexplainable manmade spheres weighing up to a ton. While they investigated the ancient mystery, I explored The Arch, redolent with a variety of fish and White Tip Cave, full of white-tipped reef sharks. But my favorite dive came early the next morning when I was the only hardy passenger to show up.

The Captain, Hugo, has a special site he calls El Bajo Del Diablo. It was difficult to find — we almost gave up — but our perseverance paid off. As we started

swimming down toward two large white-tipped reef sharks, I became distracted by a green moray eel peering out of a rock. Then suddenly the water turned dark, as if the sun had gone out. Gazing upward, I was astounded by a school of more than 100 mobula manta rays at the surface, followed shortly thereafter by an even larger school of barracuda. Later in the dive, I was swimming close to Hugo when our third buddy, Jose, pointed behind me. As I turned, there was an amorous six-foot long, 200-pound jewfish gaining ground. He kept me company for about 10 minutes before leaving to find a more responsive mate. On just one dive, I saw more than many people might see in a week of diving in many Caribbean destinations.

As I reflected on my visits to Costa Rica, it became clear that the diving — from far offshore Cocos to the near-shore sites — is some of the best in the world. However, the looming threat of mass tourism kept creeping back into my thoughts.

A country once abandoned by gold-hungry Spanish explorers is now running the risk of being overrun by literally millions of tourists, from the back-packing ecotourist to the five-star traveler. Whether it will achieve the idealistic "sustainable development" depends on striking a cordial balance between reaping the financial benefits of tourism while keeping its natural resources intact. ■

Ellen Sarbone is a photo-journalist who also keeps busy with a weekly radio travel show in California.



Getting There

Airlines: American, Aviateca, Continental and Lacs, Mexicana, Taca and United Airlines.

Entry Requirements: Passport

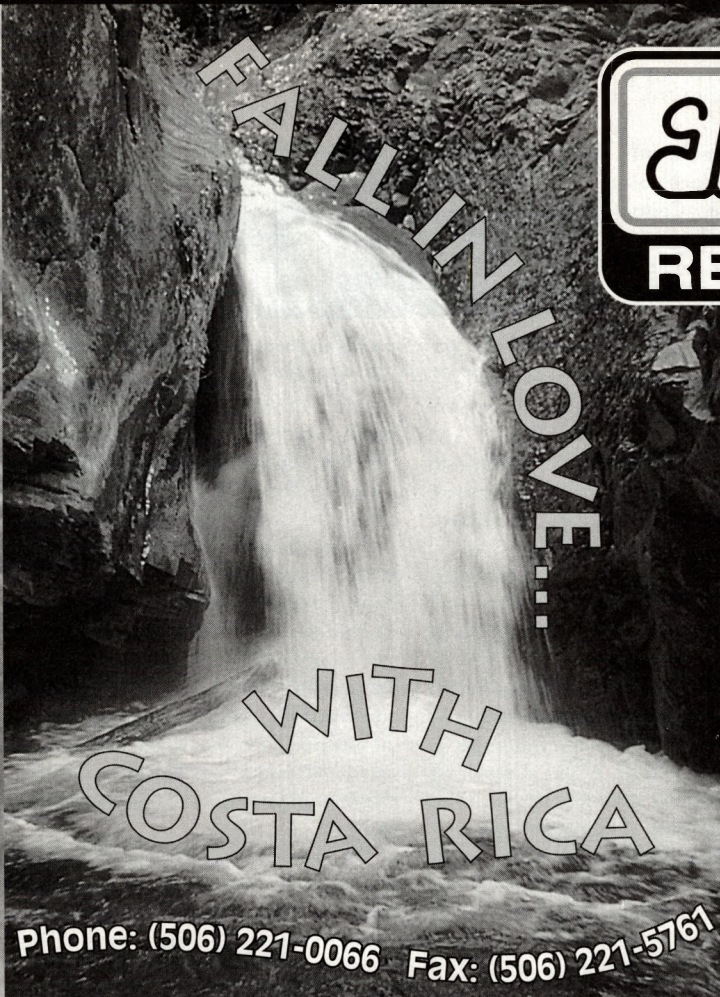
Electricity: Same as U.S. / 110 volts

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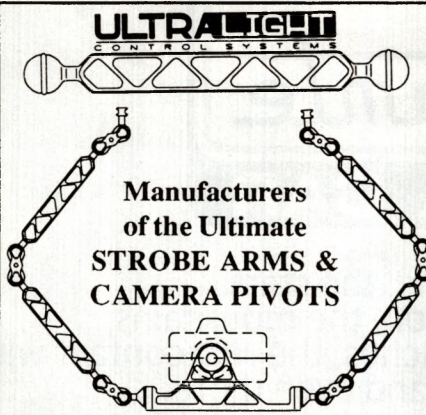


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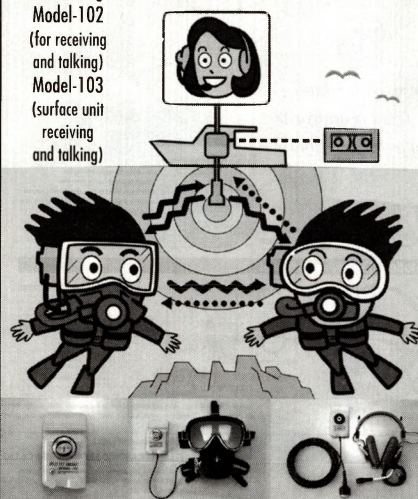
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Shark Dreams & Longline Nightmares

As our liveaboard left the dock at Puntarenas, Costa Rica, I looked out over the water, realizing that I was only three hundred seventy-five miles from one of my biggest diving dreams, seeing the schooling hammerheads of Cocos Island.

During the two week trip, diving with the hammerheads became commonplace, but my fascination with them never dulled. On several dives, we saw more than a dozen of them at a time, as well as numerous white tips. I fired away at them with my camera, strobes flashing, fully immersed in my dream.

Late one afternoon a few days before our trip ended, a small, tired-looking fishing boat pulled into our anchorage at Chatham Bay. Cocos Island is a marine park, and fishing is prohibited within five miles of the island. I questioned our captain about it, and he told me that such boats are allowed to enter the park to seek water and safe anchorage but are not allowed to fish.

Sure enough, the boat pulled up to a waterfall which cascaded into the bay and filled up its jerry jugs fresh from the tap. It anchored near our boat as the sun was setting. I kept after our captain with questions about the fishermen, and he told me that they were long liners, whose major catch was shark.

Sharks? Longliners? My questions were coming on strong, so the captain decided it'd be easier to take me over to the boat rather than endure further interrogation. My friend Deborah speaks fluent Spanish and came along to help interpret. The captain welcomed us onboard right away as this six pack of "old men and the sea" had been away from shore for 37 days.

Six guys, a 32-foot. boat, and no plumbing. It was "Three Men in a Tub" multiplied by two. The captain was pleased that we were interested in his work, and I fired away questions as quickly as Deb could translate.

We learned that they had ventured as far as 700 miles from their home port of Puntarenas in search of sharks, mostly silky, dusky, and hammerhead. They may have as many as 64,000 hooks in the water at a time. The hooks are strung for many miles on long lines marked by buoys, hence the term "longline."

The longlines are baited and set adrift in the evening, claiming their catch of sharks, billfish or anything else that comes along. In the morning, the boat locates buoys marking the line, and the haul-in begins.



Above: Fins drying on top of fishing boat.
Right: Tiger shark caught on shark hook



photograph by Doug Perrine

Most of the sharks and other fish die during the night. Those still alive are shot or clubbed to death before being brought onboard. The catch is cleaned and crammed into the belly of the small boat. The captain explained that they are met at sea by larger mother ships equipped with freezers, where the catch is off-loaded. Then the whole scenario is acted out again: set the lines, kill the sharks, and on and on. Often for months at a time.

He opened the hold to offer me a glimpse of this trip's catch. At first, I half-looked, much the same as when I was nine years old and my neighbor's cat lay dead in the road after being struck by a car. Then my eyes opened wide. There they were, my dreams, caught, finned, and skinned, lying in bloody pink brine in the bottom of the boat. Their heads had been cut off. They didn't look anything like the great and powerful giants that had glided through the water or swum through my imagination. The scene was much worse than Tiger the cat asleep in the street forever. It didn't matter that I wasn't nine years old anymore.

At the end of the trip, as we were disembarking after a fabulous two weeks of awesome diving, we saw a line of refrigerated trucks parked near one of the mother ships the captain had mentioned a few days before. I watched as the frozen shark carcasses were flung from the ship onto the dock. A gray haze rose from the pile of what was now nothing more than icy fishsticks lying on the cement.

The captain and his crew didn't hate sharks. They didn't kill them for sport. It all had to do with supply and demand, global economics, and other obscure forces that they didn't completely grasp. But these were the forces that kept the six men and their bloody tub at sea for months at a time. To them, the only good shark is a dead shark, whose meat means money, whose fins fetch as much as seventy-five dollars per kilo. They were fishers of money. But to me, they were killers of dreams. ■

— Cathryn Castle

RESORTNEWS

The **South Ocean Golf & Beach Resort**, New Providence, Bahamas, has completed a three million dollar make-over. The 250 room resort has completed the second phase of refurbishment that included all gardenview rooms and the Casaurina Restaurant plus a fresh look for the public areas and corridors as well as a new night club, the Flamingo Club. For more information, call (305) 663-1660.

Borneo Divers and Sea Sports (Sabah) Sdn Bhd will manage and operate Pulau Sangalaki in co-operation with the Local Government Enterprise under the spirit of **BIMP-EAGA** (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and East Asian Growth Area). As such, they will be rebuilding and renovating all existing facilities on the island with expected openings in June 1996. For more details, call 60-88-222226.

The **Hotel Les Tipaniers** in Moorea, French Polynesia, has opened the **Tipaniers Iti**, located in Papetoai in a magnificent setting next to the entrance

to Opunohu Bay. The Tipaniers Iti offers five Polynesian style bungalows, each equipped with a kitchenette and capable of accommodating four people. For more information, call (800) 521-7242.

Dive Paradise, Cozumel, Mexico, has made improvements to services, facilities, boats and overall operation. Improvements include a new 38 foot boat, the *Renegado*, new Sherwood rental equipment and tanks, renovation of all the big boats with new, larger engines and the addition of DAN oxygen units to all of the boats. For reservations or information, call (800) 328-2288.

Ocean Club in Providenciales, Turks & Caicos, has recently expanded with 34 new suites, a fantastic new restaurant, the Gecko Grill and the Ocean Plaza shopping area complete with Sand Castle convenience store, Oasis Boutique, Royal Jewels and Tropical Auto. Other additions to the resort include The Garden pool with swim-up bar, a fitness center and an expanded dive and watersport center. Provo Turtle Divers is an on-site

facility offering day and night diving. For more information, call (800) 457-8787.

Treasure Island Resort, a 280 room resort on the island of Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, has opened a new watersports operation. The new operation will provide guests with diving and watersport services plus the latest in dive equipment. Treasure Island Resort's state-of-the-art, full service retail dive center is slated to open June 1, 1996. For reservations and information, call (800) 203-0775.

Scuba Outpost, on the west end of Catalina Island, California, affords divers a unique base for exploring the kelp forests and reefs of the California Channel Islands. The rustic cabin accommodations are only a few foot steps from the waters of Emerald Bay. The facilities include showers, lockers, gear rinse and dry area, and a full service dive shop. Kayaks, boat diving, unlimited beach diving and advanced or specialty certification are offered. For more information, call (800) 574-0900. ■



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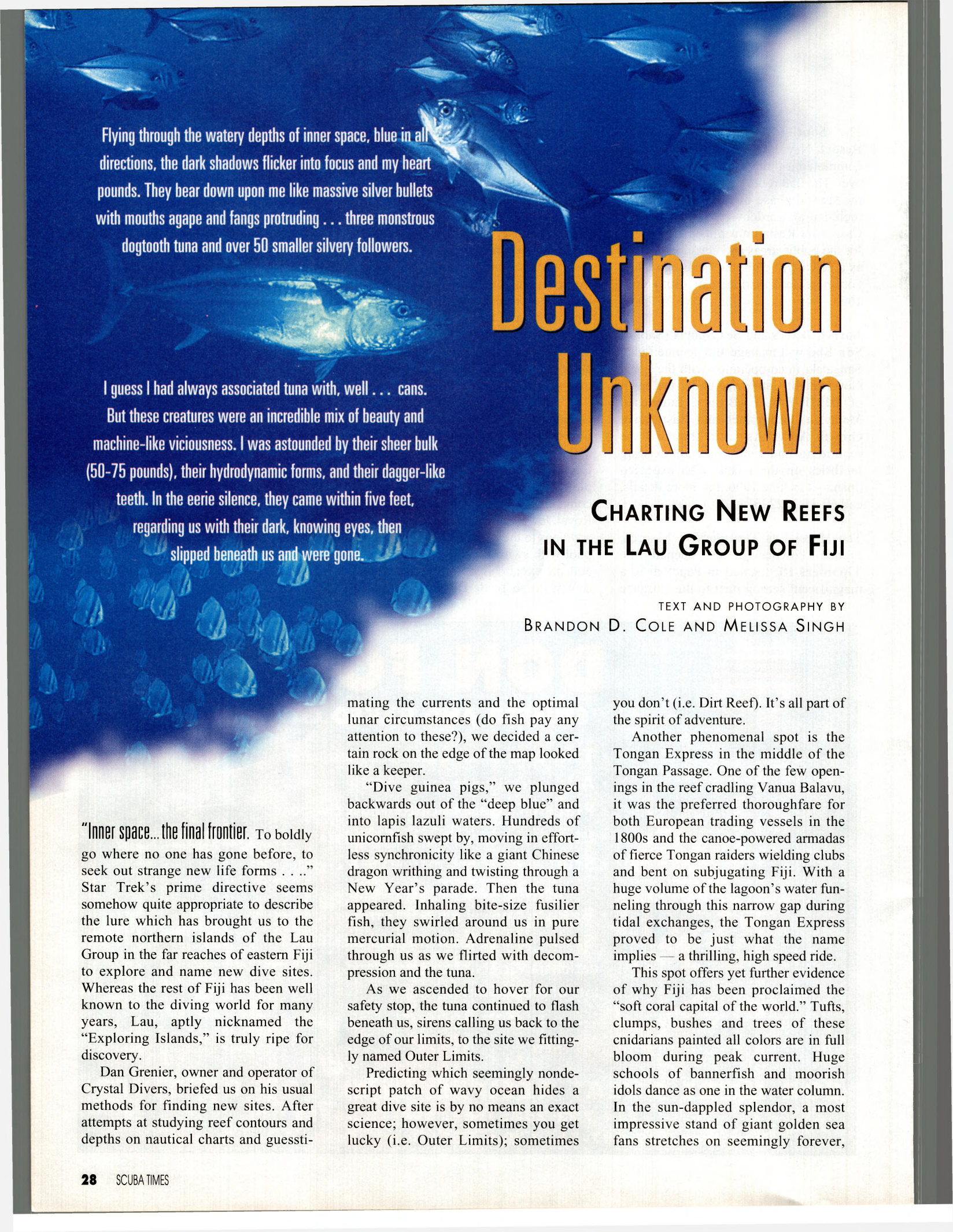
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Flying through the watery depths of inner space, blue in all directions, the dark shadows flicker into focus and my heart pounds. They bear down upon me like massive silver bullets with mouths agape and fangs protruding . . . three monstrous dogtooth tuna and over 50 smaller silvery followers.

I guess I had always associated tuna with, well . . . cans. But these creatures were an incredible mix of beauty and machine-like viciousness. I was astounded by their sheer bulk (50-75 pounds), their hydrodynamic forms, and their dagger-like teeth. In the eerie silence, they came within five feet, regarding us with their dark, knowing eyes, then slipped beneath us and were gone.

Destination Unknown

CHARTING NEW REEFS IN THE LAU GROUP OF FIJI

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BRANDON D. COLE AND MELISSA SINGH

"Inner space...the final frontier. To boldly go where no one has gone before, to seek out strange new life forms . . ." Star Trek's prime directive seems somehow quite appropriate to describe the lure which has brought us to the remote northern islands of the Lau Group in the far reaches of eastern Fiji to explore and name new dive sites. Whereas the rest of Fiji has been well known to the diving world for many years, Lau, aptly nicknamed the "Exploring Islands," is truly ripe for discovery.

Dan Grenier, owner and operator of Crystal Divers, briefed us on his usual methods for finding new sites. After attempts at studying reef contours and depths on nautical charts and guessti-

mat ing the currents and the optimal lunar circumstances (do fish pay any attention to these?), we decided a certain rock on the edge of the map looked like a keeper.

"Dive guinea pigs," we plunged backwards out of the "deep blue" and into lapis lazuli waters. Hundreds of unicornfish swept by, moving in effortless synchronicity like a giant Chinese dragon writhing and twisting through a New Year's parade. Then the tuna appeared. Inhaling bite-size fusilier fish, they swirled around us in pure mercurial motion. Adrenaline pulsed through us as we flirted with decompression and the tuna.

As we ascended to hover for our safety stop, the tuna continued to flash beneath us, sirens calling us back to the edge of our limits, to the site we fittingly named Outer Limits.

Predicting which seemingly nondescript patch of wavy ocean hides a great dive site is by no means an exact science; however, sometimes you get lucky (i.e. Outer Limits); sometimes

you don't (i.e. Dirt Reef). It's all part of the spirit of adventure.

Another phenomenal spot is the Tongan Express in the middle of the Tongan Passage. One of the few openings in the reef cradling Vanua Balavu, it was the preferred thoroughfare for both European trading vessels in the 1800s and the canoe-powered armadas of fierce Tongan raiders wielding clubs and bent on subjugating Fiji. With a huge volume of the lagoon's water funneling through this narrow gap during tidal exchanges, the Tongan Express proved to be just what the name implies — a thrilling, high speed ride.

This spot offers yet further evidence of why Fiji has been proclaimed the "soft coral capital of the world." Tufts, clumps, bushes and trees of these cnidarians painted all colors are in full bloom during peak current. Huge schools of bannerfish and moorish idols dance as one in the water column. In the sun-dappled splendor, a most impressive stand of giant golden sea fans stretches on seemingly forever,

not a single one showing signs of fin harassment.

Hard as it may be to pull your eyes away from the reef and its residents, it pays to turn around and scan the open water too. On one lucky day, Dan sighted a truly rare beast, king of the pelagic kingdom, a sailfish in full magnificence racing past on the Express.

As we raced back from the Tongan Passage, we came across another rare beast — a proud Tongan king. It was Joe (our resort concierge) enthroned upon his palatial “floating restaurant,” a half-submerged raft of doubtful seaworthiness. Two loyal subjects, fellow guests at the resort, occupied plastic lawn chairs at his side. Everyone was laughing and happily catching fish on hook and line, gobbling down their charbroiled sea delicacies, bananas and cassava root all cooked on an oil drum hibachi. King Joe grunted with pleasure as we scrambled aboard, holding forth a blackened fish with stubby soot-stained fingers. We thanked him with a hearty Tongan “Malo a lele” and reverently squatted down to devour the ash-sprinkled trout with our fingers.

The Tongan influence in Lau is evident not only in the names and language but also in the food, decoration, and the people themselves. With Lau’s chain of nearly 100 islands situated roughly halfway between the Kingdom of Tonga to the east and the main islands of Fiji to the west, this neighborly weaving seems only natural. The Lau group is in fact a Tongan peace offering made in the bloody warring days of the past.

Those days have long since vanished, leaving only a peaceful island paradise where strangers are welcomed with open arms and eloquent speeches in broken English. At Lomaloma Resort, the ever-smiling Fijian staff greets us by name while Tongan style “mekes” delight us by night with song and dance. The resort’s manager, “Auntie” Lynette, fascinates all with her island lore and whips up a mean fish curry, taro leaf soup, and coconut cream pie to boot.

Fiji’s underwater gardens are just delicious. Lau’s “Magic Kingdom,” on the protected back side of Vanua Balavu, delivered what Dan promised as some of the best diving he’s found in the area. We made three consecutive dives near Nggillangila

Passage at Neptune Gardens with barely more surface interval than the time necessary to change film. One shallow outcropping in particular seemed the center of activity. Seductively wriggling cleaner fish picked the parasites from angels and anthias. Clouds of swarming baby fairy basslets pulsed left, then right, with each blast of our

cameras’ strobe lights. An amorous boxfish couple rubbed noses and bellies, spinning seemingly out of control up to the surface, the insistent male blushing yellow and blue. Bulging-eyed blennies, lizards of the underwater world, scooted and scampered about. Sea whips and velcro-armed crinoids sheltered tiny symbiotic roommates—



Predicting which seemingly nondescript
patch of wavy ocean hides a great
dive site is by no means
an exact science...

The *Deep Blue* dive boat sets out to discover new dive sites.

Inset: Melissa cruises over rich gardens of hard coral.

Opposite: At four feet in length and 75 pounds, the dogtooth tuna is one of the most advanced of fishes.



shrimp, crabs, gobies, and clingfish.

Each day in Lau was full of adventure both above and below the surface. We crawled our way into Dead Man's Cave with its flowstone stalagmites and a macabre death's head rock formation looming above. Women and children from nearby villages were once stashed in here during brutal tribal wars. In Turtle Lake we slogged through sucking orange mud, home to millions of tiny shrimp which scuttled between our toes. Two landlocked sea turtles also live in the small lake, placed here years ago by villagers. Following local customs, the turtles will be sacrificed to honor the local chieftain (the Tui Lau) and his son when death claims them.

And on tiny Bird Island, we walked right up to photograph nesting red footed boobies. It was

only later that we found out that the fluffy white chicks often regurgitate half-digested fish chunks in your direction if you come too close!

We stumbled across new dive sites everywhere we ventured, such as Moonlit Sonata, Lion's Cage and Cori's Place. This last dive, named after Dan's infant son, was a colorful playground swathed in pastel hard-coral blankets. A large rock covered in swaying purple anemones housed its own nursery of clownfish and their iridescent green eggs. One distressed damsel was intent on protecting her brood, trying to get at our eyes and then fiercely attacking our bubbles when we burst forth in laughter.

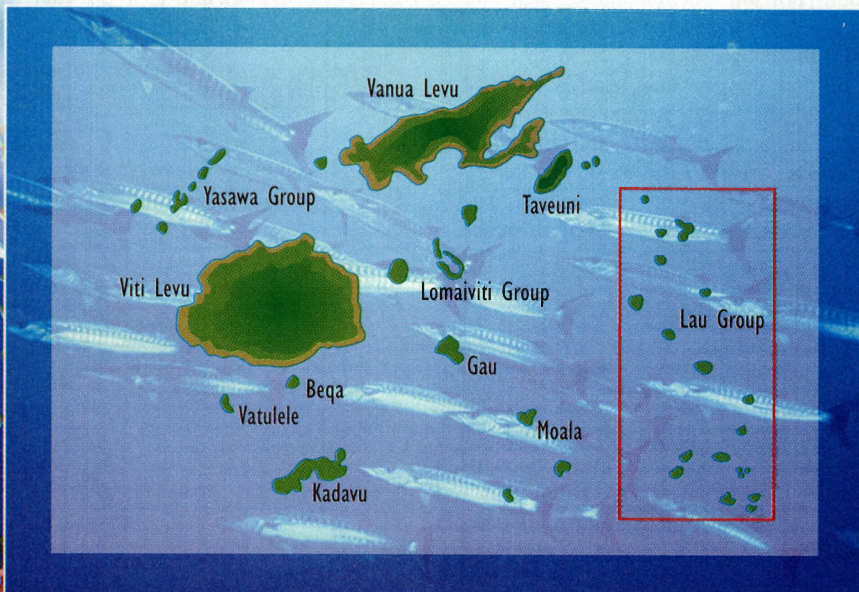
A profusion of strange and wondrous marine life has taken up residence in this little corner of the South Pacific. The very reefs themselves are alive, the backbone of this thriving marine ecosystem. Recognizing this, the Fijian government has declared the waters of Lau officially protected. Commercial fishing is prohibited, and exclusive diving privileges for Lau have been granted to Crystal Divers.

Through such measures and strict policies of "take only pictures, leave only bubbles" diving and live boating rather than anchoring, man's destructive impact on the fragile reefs and their residents should be minimized.

In this day and age, when frozen chumsicles and Cheezwhiz desserts are commonly used to attract critters, it is such a simple, complete joy to slip beneath the ocean's ceiling and not find domesticated marine life with mouths open wide, frantically jockeying for position in the lunch line. Dan does not bait creatures or manipulate encounters in any way. If animals want to come close, they do so naturally, curiously. Divers encounter "wildlife" on the animals' terms, in their world.

Nowhere was this subtlety so obvious than at the Neverending Story. A world class spot for reliable sightings of a wide variety of pelagics, it's a marvelous menagerie of the sea's creatures where a meeting with nearly any critter is possible, from minke whales to mantas. Dan says this dive has proven totally different every time.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



... we're carried alongside a sheer cliff ablaze with first yellow, then purple, soft corals...

Vibrantly colored soft corals feed in the current as fairy basslets frequent nearby.

FIJI TRAVEL Information

The Islands:

Fiji is blessed with over 300 tropical islands. You'll arrive on the largest island **Viti Levu** and probably head to one of the outer islands for Fiji's best diving. Just south of Viti Levu, you'll find **Vatulele**, **Bega** and **Kadavu**, which offer both great diving and world-class accommodations. The **Lomaiviti Group** consists of seven islands in the central part of Fiji and is rich in Fijian history — and more great diving. Traveling north, you'll find **Vanua Levu**, the second largest island in Fiji. Look to the southwest of Vanua Levu for unbeatable diving in **Taveuni**, **Matagi**, **Lacaula** and the more remote **Lau Group**.

Getting there:

From Los Angeles, nonstop flights are available to Nadi, Fiji. Try Air Pacific at (800) 227-4446 or Quantas at (800) 227-4500.

Travel within Fiji:

For transportation within Fiji (and to ultimate diving), try Air Fiji at (800) 677-4277 or Sunflower Airlines at (800) 224-0220.

Fiji Visitor's Bureau:

(800) 932-3454

Entry Requirements: For U.S. citizens, a valid passport is required.

Language: Although Fijian is the official language, English is widely spoken.

Weather: Due to its south of the equator location, Fiji's winter is our summer (and vice versa). During the winter (April through October), air temperatures range from 65 to 80 degrees and water temperatures between 75 and 78 degrees. During the summer months, air temperatures are 70-85 degrees and water temperatures range from 80 to 82 degrees.

Best diving months: April through November have the best visibility.



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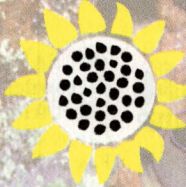
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Without warning, they begin to appear, materializing through unseen tears in the blue fabric all around us. Like a volley of arrows shot from beyond, scores of barracuda rush towards us. Throngs of big-eye jacks and tieria batfish hustle on their way down the pelagic highway. A venerable green turtle, having no reason to fear us (the "no-riding" policy should keep it this way), drifts over to investigate us before pulling for the surface.

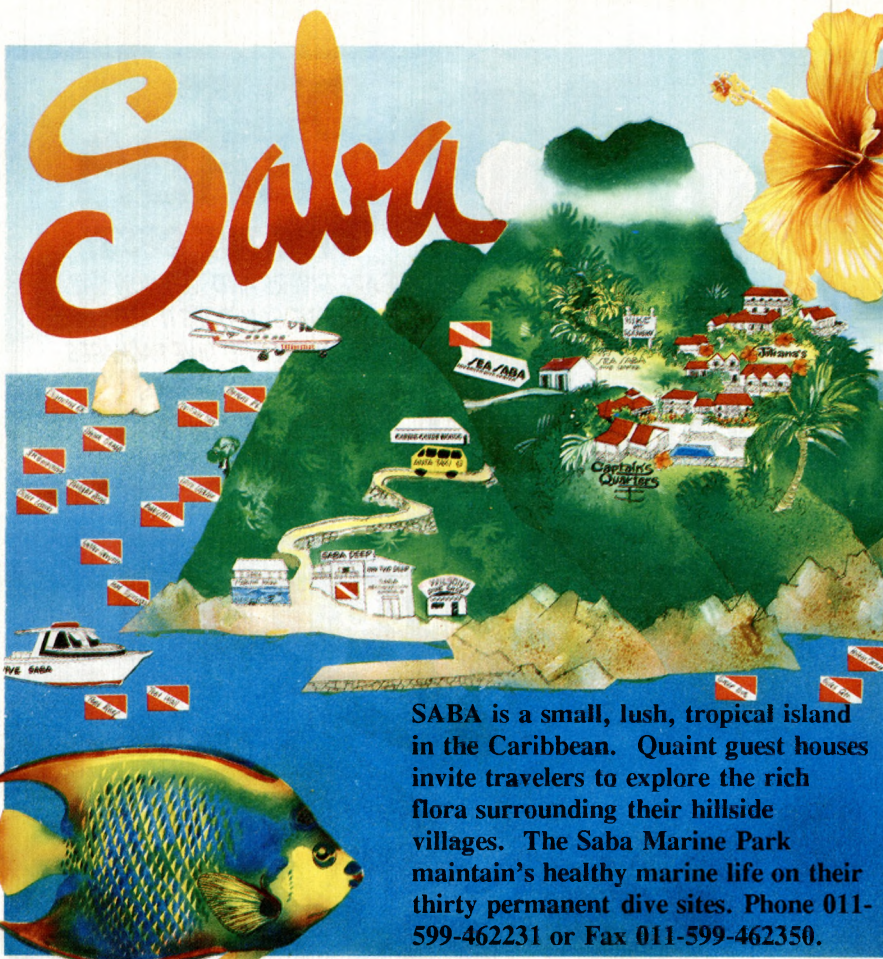
Then the first shark appears, a big, meaty silvertip. The nine-foot bruiser rockets up to our level, circles warily, then descends into silence and shadow. Two gray reefs close in on us from both sides. Three hammerheads patrol underneath, their business ends swinging side to side like metal detectors sounding the deep for a snack. Another hammerhead (how did it sneak above us?) is silhouetted against the sun, a twelve-foot malignant tattoo, blackness against the brightness. We are in the middle of the Dakuwaqa's playpen, and for a moment, it seems uncertain as to what mood the Shark God is in. The next instant, our elasmobranch playmates are gone.

With images of sharks still burned into our eyes and prowling the shadows of our minds, we're carried alongside a sheer cliff ablaze with first yellow, then purple, soft corals — Lau's very own Yellow and Purple Walls. A huge manta ray glides by us, scooping up a planktonic breakfast with its gigantic dustpan mouth. The mammoth sea butterfly then flaps its wings in farewell and banks sharply downward to continue on its way. Still in shock from all we've seen, we attempt nonchalantly to continue on ours. The dive isn't over yet.

This site wonderfully hints at the undiscovered potential of the exploring isles of Lau. The diving there is in its embryonic stages, and its character is still developing and improving. We are only in the first chapter of the Neverending Story. Who can say what treasures remain to be found? The only certainty is that Lau, with all the traditional "best of Fiji," plus its own unique flavor and no crowds above or below water, holds tremendous promise as one of the newest premier dive destinations. ▀

The authors would like to extend a "Vinaka Vaka Levu" (warmest thanks) to Crystal Divers and Lomaloma Resort.

Brandon Cole, an outstanding photo-journalist, has made the ultimate dive by popping the question to Melissa Singh. Congratulations from Scuba Times.



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Archaic Medicine

As we were about to leave for a diving trip to Fiji this past October, our monthly issue of *National Geographic* arrived with an article featuring the "racial antagonisms" between the native Fijians and the Indian population ("The Two Worlds Of Fiji," page 114, October 1995).

After spending 11 days on three islands (Laucala, Taveuni and Viti Levu), we saw none of the racism which was headlined by *National Geographic*; on the contrary; the Fijians were the most friendly natives that we have ever come in contact with on our many dive trips throughout the world. The Indo-Fijians that we encountered, mainly shopkeepers and airport employees, were courteous and friendly. One of our native dive-masters did ask what we thought of the "Indians," apparently having read the article and being curious about our reactions. The ethnic Fijians, mandated by British law to own no less than 83% of the land, comprise about half the population and replaced the Indian-dominated Parliament in 1987 by bloodless coup.



While on Fiji Forbes (Laucala), our group of diving doctors was taken to an adjacent island Quamea, whose culture is a quaint mixture of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Greeted formally by its chieftain, we were feted with a "kava" ceremony and a "meke" dance; in addition, we were shown their medical clinic, a thatch-roofed hut containing only out-of-date supplies and no equipment. A partially completed clinic building was also proudly exhibited, to be used by the public health doctor who visited sometimes monthly, local "nurses" providing care in the interim.

Actually, the people have very good medical care available on the larger islands, their main problems being early diagnosis and proper treatment due to lack of transportation between the islands. The flower-garlanded grave of the chieftain's two-year-old grandson gave mute testimony to the lack of modern medical care; the child had recently died of pneumonia, an illness easily cured by antibiotics.

— Ernest S Campbell, MD, FACS

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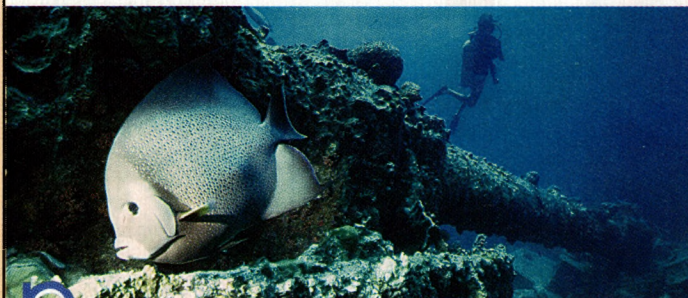
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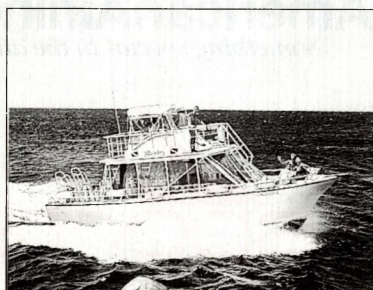
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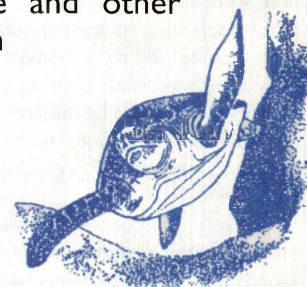
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Brittle Stars

Invade California's Channel Islands

Even if you are not a camera enthusiast, if you have ever seen the snake-like arms of a brittle star radiate outward from the animal's central disc and spread across a colorful background, you probably realized that a single specimen can make a wonderful photographic subject. Just watching one of these echinoderms walk across the sea floor can provide a memorable moment. Imagine, then, what it must be like diving on many reefs in southern California's Channel Islands where an explosion in the brittle star population has made their numbers uncountable.

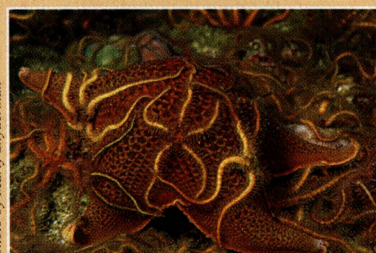


photo by Marty Snyderman

Observations from reefs at San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara Island document the phenomena. Occurring in an almost endless variety of colors, brittle stars so strongly dominate the reefs and surrounding sand that it is difficult in many sites to distinguish other features on the sea floor.

Seemingly sensitive to light, brittle stars normally tend to spend their days in secluded areas or buried in the sand. But that was not the case when I was at the Channel Islands. Perhaps because all the secluded places in the reefs are occupied and perhaps because some unidentified characteristic makes living conditions significantly different, entangled masses of brittle stars occur almost everywhere one looks. Sea urchins, sea stars, sea fans, kelp holdfasts, and rocky reefs are all covered in brittle stars, which, in countless cases, are also intertwined with other brittle stars.

The populations of giant multi-rayed sun stars, natural predators of brittle stars, have also increased dramatically as they try to take advantage of the sudden increase in the numbers of brittle stars. It is not at all uncommon for divers to observe sun stars crawling rapidly across the bottom as brittle stars scurry to get out of their path.

Long time divers and biologists who are very familiar with the Channel Islands suspect that the phenomena is the result of a natural cycle in nature, but no one is absolutely certain. Such a dramatic increase in the number of brittle stars has not been seen in the Channel Islands for at least 20 years.

— By Marty Snyderman

Dive the Mystical Mayan Barrier Reef

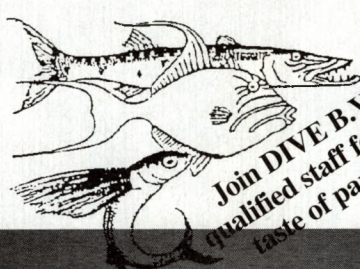
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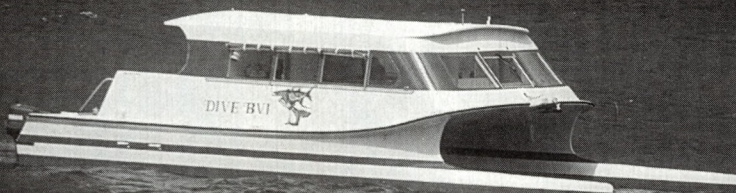




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The north wind caught us by surprise. Even in this day of satellite weather, no one had checked the forecast. Why bother, we thought; we were only going a few miles offshore, and the previous day had been great. (As it turned out, no forecast had been correct anyway, and many other mariners were caught off-guard by the sudden change in wind, some dangerously so.)

A change in wind direction usually doesn't mean much to divers in Belize since almost all of the atolls and cayes have leeward sides to explore. This day was different, though. Our destination was a place in southern Belize I had been hearing about that a small group of guides had been visiting for years. No one has an "official" name for it; some call it the Shark Hole; others have named it the Black Hole. No matter the name, I had heard enough to make me want to hunker down in the stiff wind in a 26-foot open Mexican skiff to find it. The entrance to the hole is only 5 feet across and 10 feet long and is in 30 feet of water, close to Tobacco Caye, one of Belize's many southern cayes. The crack expands into a large round opening 100 feet deep and maybe 200 feet across. Sunlight shines straight down into the center, and divers have been known to encounter any number of sharks while exploring the outer walls.

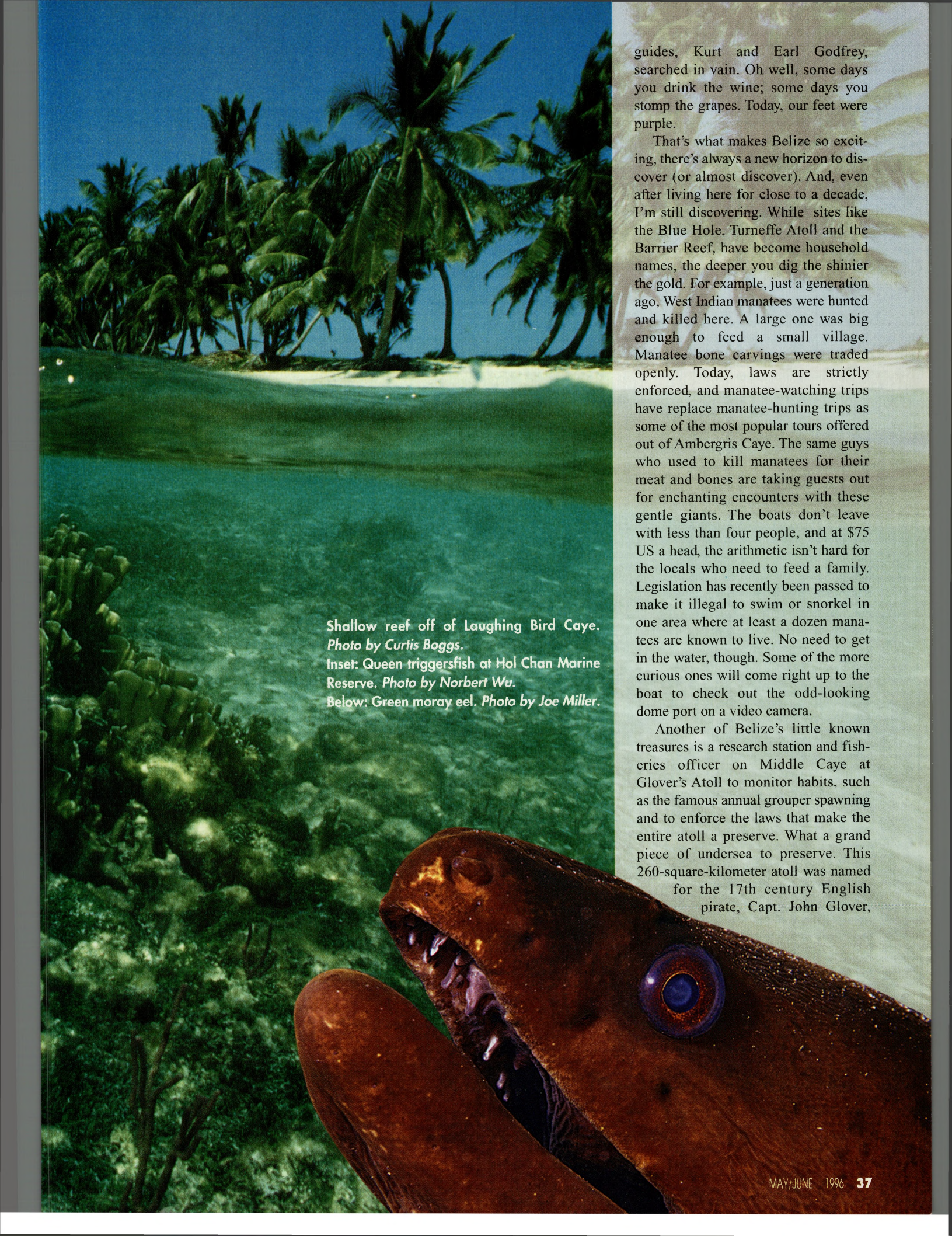
As we got in the area and started gearing up, our guides slowly circled, looking for the cavern entrance. The normally crystalline water was now like looking into a bowl of soggy corn flakes. For close to three hours, our



SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW

BORROWED AND BLUE IN BELIZE

BY JOE MILLER



Shallow reef off of Laughing Bird Caye.
Photo by Curtis Boggs.

Inset: Queen triggersfish at Hol Chan Marine Reserve. *Photo by Norbert Wu.*

Below: Green moray eel. *Photo by Joe Miller.*

guides, Kurt and Earl Godfrey, searched in vain. Oh well, some days you drink the wine; some days you stomp the grapes. Today, our feet were purple.

That's what makes Belize so exciting, there's always a new horizon to discover (or almost discover). And, even after living here for close to a decade, I'm still discovering. While sites like the Blue Hole, Turneffe Atoll and the Barrier Reef, have become household names, the deeper you dig the shinier the gold. For example, just a generation ago, West Indian manatees were hunted and killed here. A large one was big enough to feed a small village. Manatee bone carvings were traded openly. Today, laws are strictly enforced, and manatee-watching trips have replace manatee-hunting trips as some of the most popular tours offered out of Ambergris Caye. The same guys who used to kill manatees for their meat and bones are taking guests out for enchanting encounters with these gentle giants. The boats don't leave with less than four people, and at \$75 US a head, the arithmetic isn't hard for the locals who need to feed a family. Legislation has recently been passed to make it illegal to swim or snorkel in one area where at least a dozen manatees are known to live. No need to get in the water, though. Some of the more curious ones will come right up to the boat to check out the odd-looking dome port on a video camera.

Another of Belize's little known treasures is a research station and fisheries officer on Middle Caye at Glover's Atoll to monitor habits, such as the famous annual grouper spawning and to enforce the laws that make the entire atoll a preserve. What a grand piece of undersea to preserve. This 260-square-kilometer atoll was named for the 17th century English pirate, Capt. John Glover,

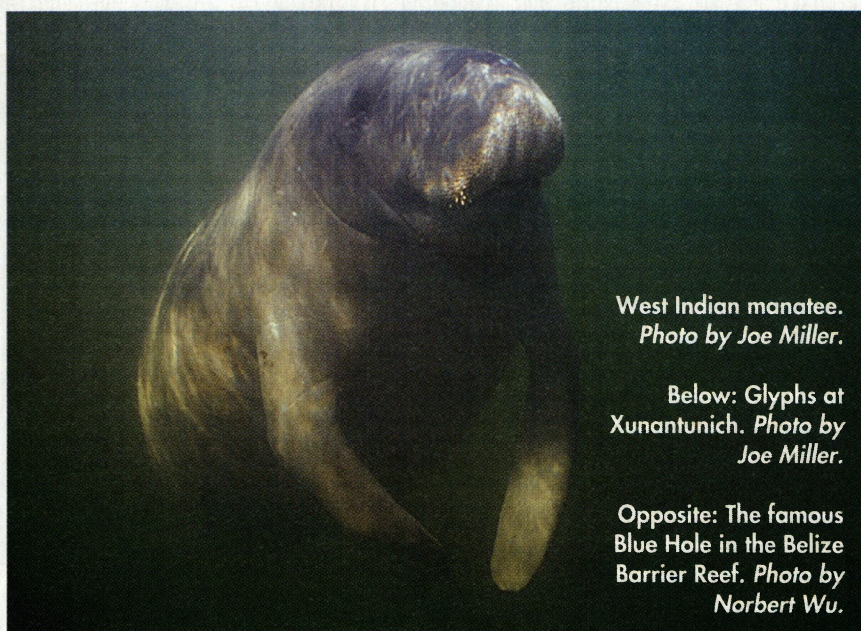
MYSTERY OF THE MAYAS

Surrounded by the ruins of an ancient Mayan religious site, the darkness of the jungle began to fuel my vivid imagination. I pictured the people who built these extravagant temples and the secrets they took with them when they left. Several Mayan sites dot the Belize countryside. Some have been restored while others are only partially excavated; their secrets waiting to be revealed.

In pre-Spanish times, the Mayan civilization flourished. Their artistic and intellectual abilities rivaled those of their European counterparts. Then, around 900 AD, for reasons that are still unexplained, the Mayan civilization collapsed. People fled their cities and religious centers and headed for the countryside. Their buildings and temples were left to the mercy of the jungle. By the time the Spanish arrived in the early 1500's, most cities were unoccupied and in decay. The arrival of the Spanish only complicated things. They brought diseases that decimated 90% of the native population. In their effort to convert the natives to Christianity, the Spanish conquerors also destroyed most of the written history of the Mayas. Only four volumes remain (imagine four Stephen King novels being left to tell our history). Their story was lost.

The Mayan people, however, continue to survive in present-day Mexico and Central America. Their culture and religion have become permanently intertwined with that of the Spanish. Although most practice Christianity, they have integrated the ancient gods into their spiritual life and often hold church services in their native tongues. We may never know the whole story behind the fall of the Mayan civilization. Each year archeologist painstakingly dig a little knowledge out of the mounds of rock, trying to unlock the secrets of the Mayas.

— Betsy Archer



West Indian manatee.
Photo by Joe Miller.

Below: Glyphs at
Xunantunich. Photo by
Joe Miller.

Opposite: The famous
Blue Hole in the Belize
Barrier Reef. Photo by
Norbert Wu.

who found refuge in its lee. Divers in the know have been coming here for years to get away from the crowd. Spectacular wall dives await the adventurous photographer wanting to fill a wide lens or macro framer. Glover's Atoll is not only the best developed biologically of the Caribbean atolls, but it also has the most diversity and is in almost pristine condition. Not as well-known as Lighthouse Atoll or Turneffe, Glover's boasts of its anonymity. It's truly unspoiled and has a wildness seen by only a few divers.

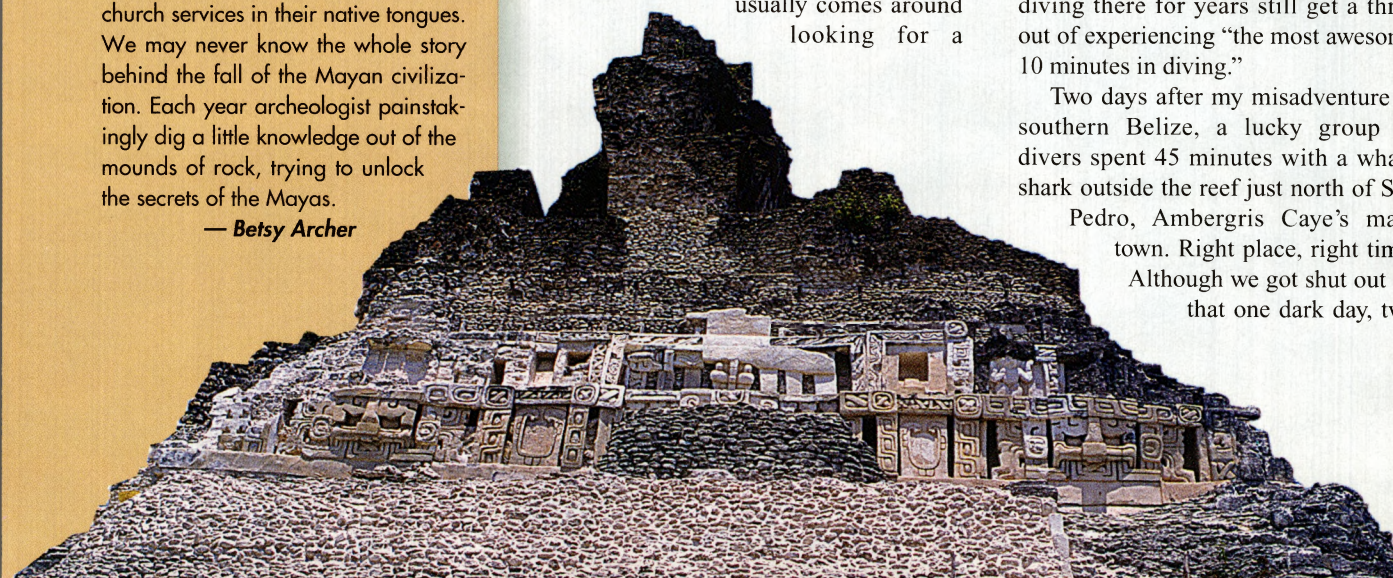
Closer to the center of action, the hottest new diving discovery is Shark-Ray Alley, an eight-foot dive/snorkel spot six miles south of San Pedro. Dozens of nurse sharks and southern stingrays gather round as guides hand-feed them sardines. This has the potential to become Belize's version of Cayman's Stingray City, only with more critter diversity. In addition to sharks and rays, a huge green moray usually comes around looking for a

handout, just to add to the excitement.

As far as diving staples go, Ambergris Caye has always been, and still is, the capital of diving in Belize. Hol Chan Marine Reserve continues to play host to thousands of divers each year. The schools of fish keep getting larger, and the friendly green morays that were photographed to lure divers here ten years ago are still around with their young ones living in the same neighborhood. The spur and groove formations just outside the barrier reef open up into the vastness as divers cruise their canyons. "M & M" caverns offer a series of four tunnels, some so long it takes a minute of steady kicking to reach the other end.

Of course, no adventure to Belize is complete without a dive in the famous Blue Hole. The giant stalactites that hang in the inky blue at 130 feet have been attracting divers for more than 20 years, and there is no wane in sight for their popularity. Many who have been diving there for years still get a thrill out of experiencing "the most awesome 10 minutes in diving."

Two days after my misadventure in southern Belize, a lucky group of divers spent 45 minutes with a whale shark outside the reef just north of San Pedro, Ambergris Caye's main town. Right place, right time. Although we got shut out on that one dark day, two



weeks later we went to some different sites just off the southern coast near Placencia. The shallow walls and beautiful tiny islands more than made up for it, giving us ample opportunities to fill our frames. Belize's southern cayes are fast becoming the hot spot for more laid back divers and snorkelers. Many operators in Belize and the States offer kayak packages from Dangriga and Placencia, both guided and unguided. Sure, you can do it on your own; its easy to see from one cay to the next and usually only takes a couple of hours of paddling. Campsites and small

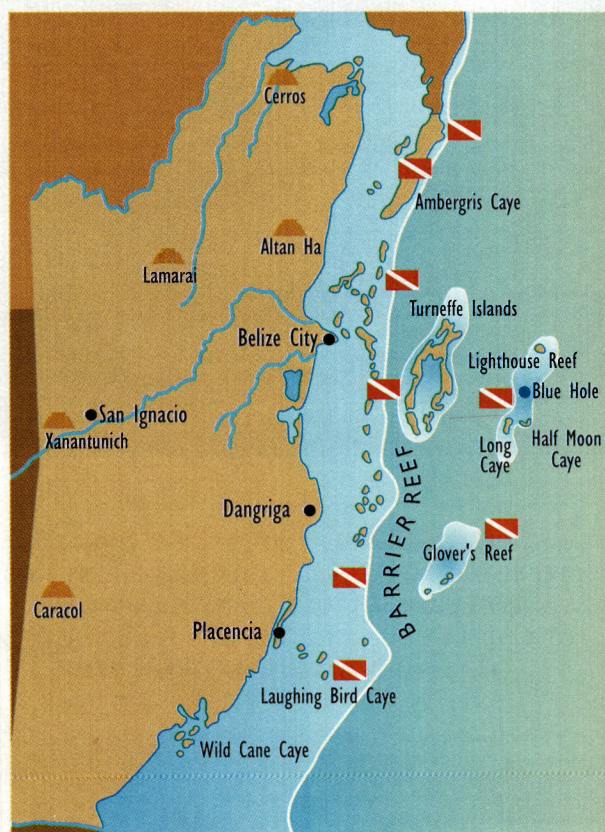
rustic resorts are popping up all over southern Belize to cater to this fast-growing market.

Newcomers to Belize can still shiver with excitement as they complete their diving check list, from lively Hol Chan to the mysterious Blue Hole. These always-popular dive sites have not

faded in their glory. And, frequent visitors to Belize can still discover new adventures — from fresh-water manatees to a search for the elusive Black Hole — which keeps Belize living up to its reputation as the true Adventure Coast. Sometimes you don't have to look very far. ■

Thanks to southern guides of Placencia.

In addition to whipping up a fine home-brewed cerveza, native Texan Joe Miller works as Editor of Belize Magazine and runs Joe Miller Photography in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye.



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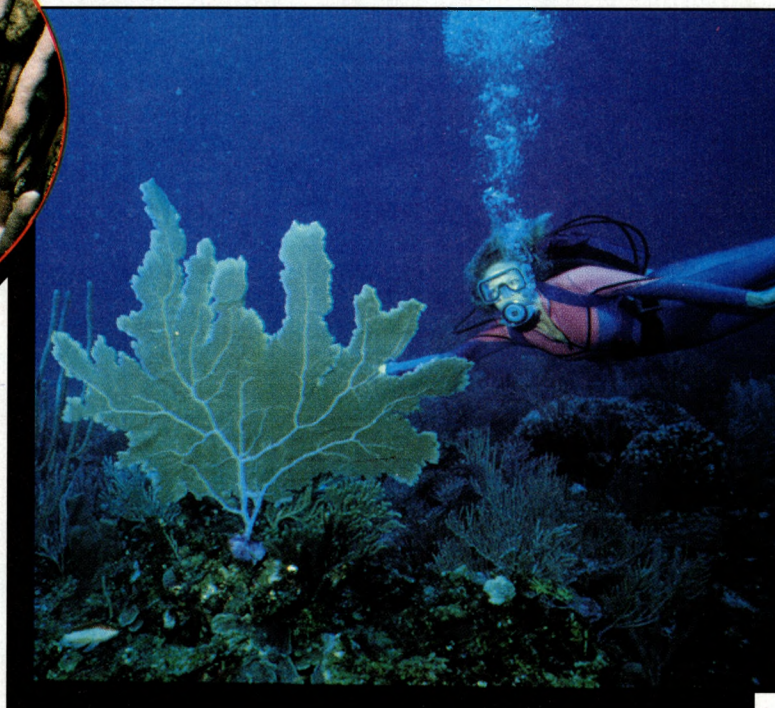
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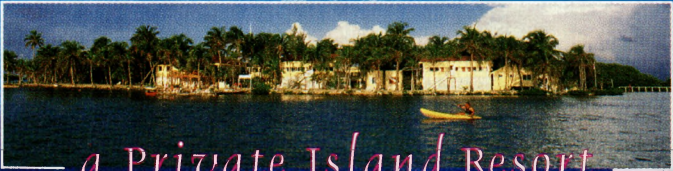
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Lake Francis Case, South Dakota

Lake Francis Case, a 105-mile-long Missouri River impoundment behind Fort Randall Dam at Pickstown, South Dakota, provides consistently clear water and high adventure for divers in the Great Plains. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the dam in the early 1950s for flood control, power generation and recreation.

Photos by Ron John



Divers enjoy many different aspects of Lake Francis Case. Instructors take advantage of the 15-25 foot visibility and 100-foot depths for all kinds of training dives. Spearfishing in the lake is legal, and game fish season runs from July 1 to March 5. Catfish and buffalo carp grow very large and challenge the underwater hunter.

"Let's dive the wall!" refers to the vertical rock wall created by cutting through a hill to route the river into the intakes for the power plant. "The Wall" starts at 50-55 feet and drops vertically to over 100 feet.

The "High Adventure" is diving the tailrace where the water comes out of the power plant. Imagine the thoughts running through the mind of the first-time tailrace diver about to step off the boat into that thundering, churning water! The exhilaration and the smile following that first run lasts for days or weeks.

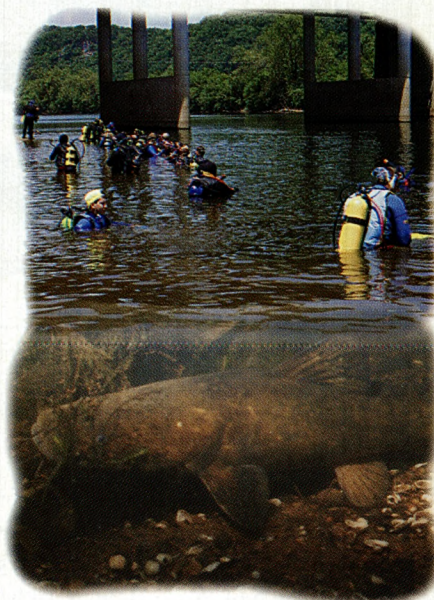
You may see hundreds of fish on one run: paddlefish, sturgeon, burbot, wall-eye, smallmouth bass, catfish, buffalo carp and suckers. All this occurs as you dodge rocks and trees and stumps while flying down the river. The faster the current and the lower the visibility (3-15 feet), and the more exciting it gets.



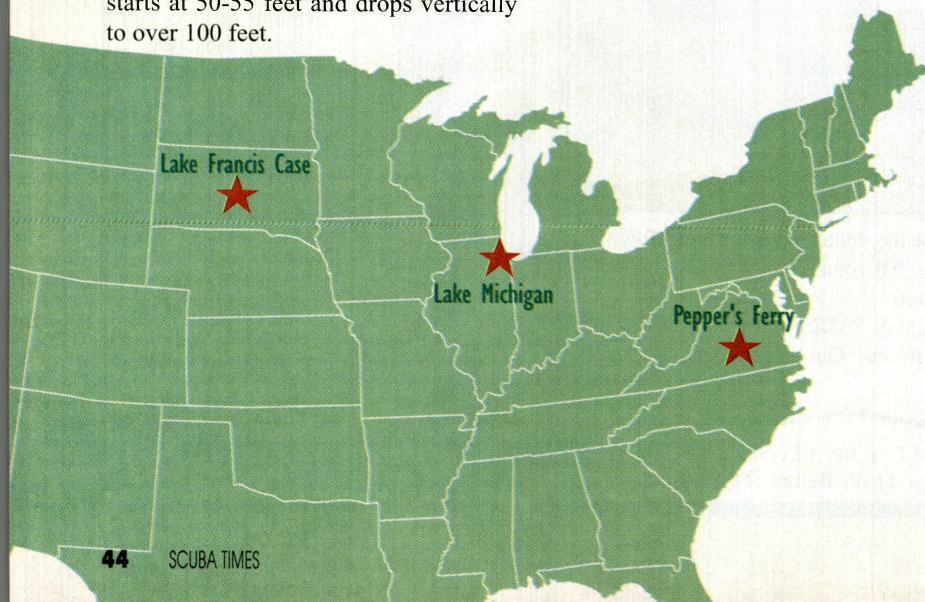
Many valuable objects litter the bottom. You can pick up anything a fisherman could possibly lose from lures to trolling motors. For artifact hunters, you can find bones, teeth and skulls of prehistoric bison who met their demise in the swift Missouri River. The fast current in the tailrace requires specific equipment and techniques. Make your first run down the tailrace with a dive operator who offers detailed briefings and dives with you for the first time.

Pickstown, South Dakota, is 150 miles north of Grand Island, Nebraska, on U.S. Highway 281. An air station operated jointly by two dive centers provides fills at Fort Randall Bait and Tackle right beside the dam. Manicured campgrounds and several excellent motels offer good places to stay. The Fort Randall Casino provides gambling and top-notch lounge entertainment just four miles down the road.

People traveling to the casino in the past five years have "discovered" South Dakota's best-kept secret—Lake Francis Case. But the lake is so large and convoluted that you can still feel that you are there nearly alone, even on a holiday weekend. The Yankton Sioux tribe that operates the casino will soon begin construction on a 10 million dollar resort hotel and marina on the lake just above the dam.



Photos by Merie Pierson



For more detailed information, call Heartland Scuba Center at 800-344-DIVE or Donovan's Hobby and Scuba Center at 605-338-6945.

— by Ron Johns

Peppers Ferry, Virginia

Located on the New River near Radford, Virginia, approximately one mile past the arsenal on Route 114. The dive site is located at the bridge as it crosses the river. That is one of the reasons it is still a popular dive site with the locals. Have you ever noticed what people throw out of their vehicles? We have found a box of love notes, a gold-colored Buddha, stereos (both car and home centers), television sets, a recliner and the usual river treasures like tires, shoes, fishing lines and lures. (We set the TV up next to the recliner but the reception wasn't good; we could only get channel cats.)

Now, don't get me wrong; there is lots to see besides the man-made stuff. With the grasses that grow along the shallow areas (10-25 feet) come a variety of fish in their own little nursery habitat. There are perch, bass, carp, muskie, walleye, sharks (just kidding about the sharks) and catfish (very, very BIG catfish).

Historically, the river is one of the oldest in North America and is one of only two rivers in the Northern Hemisphere that flow north. This makes for some interesting rock formations, especially to the geology nuts. Peppers Ferry was named after a doctor who lived in the area. Yes, there are ties to the very popular soft drink and the old ferry crossing on the New River; both were named after the same man, Dr. Pepper.

The best time of year to dive for wimp divers (warm, intelligent, marine person aka someone who doesn't want to get too cold) is summer and early fall. Year round if you have a drysuit.

There are two dive shops in the area that you can call for information:

- Diving Enterprises in Roanoke 540-345-8555
- New River Valley Scuba in Christiansburg 540-382-9258.

All in all, Pepper's Ferry on the New River is a grin. The visibility can range from good to braille, but no matter what the conditions, an enjoyable dive can be had.

— Marie Waller

Lake Michigan, Diving Chicago Style

Looking out across the waters of Lake Michigan, it's hard to imagine they're there, in the shadow of Chicago's magnificent skyline, beside crowded beaches, not far from the busy downtown area are famous ships, lost warplanes and century-old antiques.

Over the last several years, the diving conditions of Lake Michigan have improved. The lake's visibility now averages between 10 and 15 feet. It ranges from zero on windy, overcast days to 40 feet on calm, sunny days.



Photo by Kerri Horton

The water temperature of Lake Michigan in the winter drops to 32 degrees, but the average surface temperature in May and June hovers around 50 degrees. Although Chicago's hot summers warm the water to a balmy 70 degrees on the surface, it remains at about 39 degrees on the lake's floor.

Hundreds of shipwrecks, hundreds of World War II airplanes and debris from the Great Chicago Fire are entombed below the surface, preserved by the cold, salt-free water. At least 100 sites are concentrated in Chicago's immediate vicinity.

Divers agree that shipwrecks are the reason to dive Lake Michigan. The *Wells Burt*, a 100-year-old, three-masted schooner, lies a few miles east of Chicago. Settled 40 feet below the surface, it's still intact and recognizable. The hull, 50 percent of the decking, major pieces of equipment and much more, remain preserved in their original positions.

Submerged two miles east of Montrose Harbor is a famous junk yard known as the Caissons. Although it appears to be an unimpressive pile, it is actually one of Chicago's most unusual dive spots. What little remained of

Chicago after the Great Fire was towed out onto the lake and dumped. Amassed on the lake's floor are bottles, plates, horseshoes and brass fittings.

Over the years, many headline-making treasures have been discovered. Two years ago, after spending 50 years at the bottom of the Lake, a World War II combat plane was recovered. A bigger surprise was finding the World War I German submarine UC-97. The U-boat was brought to tour the United States after the war, but in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, it was taken out on the lake in 1921 and sunk. After years of

searching, the U-boat was found 20 miles northeast of Navy Pier in 200 feet of water.

The most appealing wrecks may be the ones still waiting to be found. According to a report by the Underwater Archeological Society of Chicago, Illinois waters are surrounded by 60 miles of shoreline and include over two thousand square miles of water. Under these waters are an estimated 300 sunken vessels. Only about 20 have been located and identified.

Lake Michigan is frequently overlooked by divers. This scene doesn't include clear blue water, colorful fish or tropical drinks, but it does have some extraordinary dive sites. The wrecks are as breathtaking and thought provoking as many of the more obvious dive spots.

Lake conditions are unpredictable. In a short time, calm water turns into four-foot seas. This lake should not be your first fresh water dive. For information, contact an Illinois dive store listed in our Dive Store Directory located in the back of the magazine. ■

— Kerri Horton

CDROM Training

NAUI GOES DIGITAL

BY DAVE AND SUE MILLHOUSER

We live in exciting times. Imagine all the people who would learn to dive if they weren't so busy. Many have so much going on that they just never get around to it. The National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) has teamed up with Top Hook, Inc., a computer-based training company, on a product that will make it easier for busy people to earn basic and advanced scuba certifications.

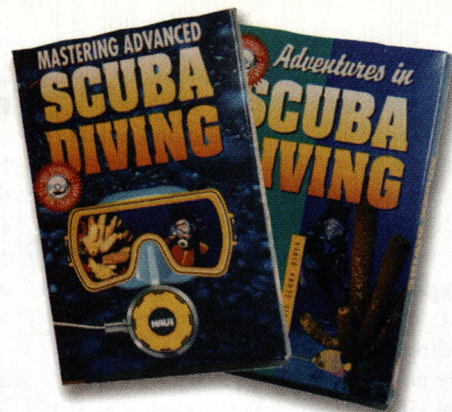
In addition to pool sessions for learning skills, dive courses require substan-

proof of completion of the classroom part of the course. Before in-water training begins, the student must pass the NAUI written exam, but most find it easy after having completed the CD work.

Tom Mann, a long-time NAUI instructor at Adventure Sports Scuba in Montgomery, Alabama, has taught with the CD for several months and is enthusiastic. "It brings people into diving who didn't have time for a traditional course," he says. "We can provide better instruction, more efficiently."

Students studying on their own, interacting with the software, learn more because they are working when it's convenient. Some students work on the computer in the dive shop and ask questions as they go.

Tom also feels that the CD provides insurance that divers are exposed to



that the need to spend hours in a classroom would make learning to dive impossible."

Like Tom Mann, Art feels that the CD course has brought lots of folks into diving who would have found classroom work impossible to schedule. He cites a West Texas couple as an example. Even though they were 150 miles from the nearest dive shop, they were able to complete the academic work at home. When they met Art for their pool work, it was accomplished quickly, saving both time and money. Checkout dives (darn) were completed in the Caymans.

When the CD students arrive for in-water work, Art feels that they have a superior grasp of theory. "The conversations that take place at the pool are on a very high plane, with students asking informed questions," because they already have the basics down, Art has the opportunity to communicate more of the little things he's learned over the years, making sure there are no gaps in their knowledge.

Both Tom and Art believe that one of the most significant benefits of the CD-ROM course is the ability to review. Since the diver owns the CD, it will always be available for "brushing up" on knowledge, perhaps in advance of a trip that will involve new dive experiences, for example, "How DO those dive tables work?"

We found both CDs easy to work with, with the material flowing in an intuitive way. Frankly, the program is so much fun that you can't help but learn (with "experienced" divers often muttering "I knew that").

Adventures in Scuba Diving (the basic course) and Mastering Advanced Scuba Diving sell for about \$60 each. System requirements are minimal, with sound and animation available to those who have the equipment. For more information or to order the CD, contact your local NAUI Dive Facility or contact NAUI at (800) 553-NAUI. ■

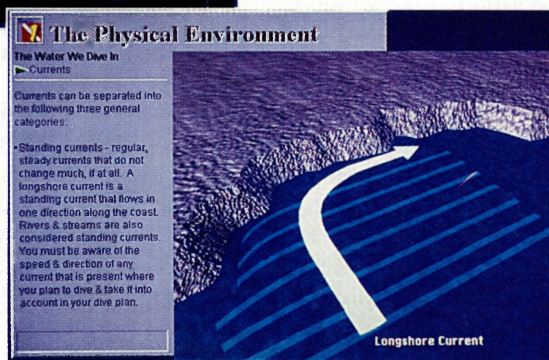


Screen captures from Basic Course

tial academic work. Two interactive CD-ROMs have been created that enable students to master the classroom portion of dive courses on their own time and at their own pace. This eliminates the need to travel to a specific place at a set time. The CDs are referenced to the appropriate NAUI texts.

After studying each section, the student completes a computerized "skill review." If 75 percent of the questions are correctly answered, the computer provides a code number that is entered on a card. The test (which changes each time) can be taken as many times as is necessary for the student to learn the material. The software flags wrong answers, analyzes performance, and gently steers until the topic is mastered.

When all the sections are successfully completed, the student mails the card (with code numbers) to Top Hook and receives a Certificate of Completion which NAUI Scuba Centers accept as



all of the material, providing an added measure of "quality assurance" that protects both the diver and the instructor. Tom is particularly excited about the intensity of the advanced course, feeling that the large amount of academic content that must be mastered makes this new medium particularly useful.

Another experienced instructor, Art Melvin (Discover Scuba in Houston, Texas), initially was doubtful about a basic course taught this way, feeling the CD is more appropriate for advanced students. Skepticism has fallen by the wayside. "This is training for people who have a life, doing so many things

Free-Diving World Record

Baja California, Mexico

On March 10, Francisco Ferreras Rodriguez, better known as "Pipin," plunged to a new world record for breath-hold diving off the coast of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Although there are at least four separate disciplines, no-limits breath-hold diving (practiced by Pipin) is the deepest. It allowed him to break his previous record by plummeting to 427 feet.

The physiological aspects of traveling to such depths are overwhelming. Forget the breath holding and just imagine the crushing pressure of 13 atmospheres. Don't try this at home. Pipin has trained for many years to accomplish this feat. By using a variety of meditative techniques, he is able to slow his heart to about 18 beats per minute, allowing him to conserve oxygen. He has also developed a greater lung capacity than most of his land-dwelling friends and is able to inhale twice as much air. His conditioning began at a very early age while spearfishing with his father off the coast of Cuba.

About a mile from the famous Land's End arch in Cabo San Lucas, Pipin boarded the heavy sled that carried him to record-setting depths. The rapid descent made it necessary for Pipin to constantly clear his ears. His lungs compressed and his blood concentrated in his heart and brain. At 427 feet, the sled came to an abrupt halt. Here, Pipin filled a balloon with compressed air from a small tank. Amid a burst of bubbles, he torpedoed to the surface. He was not able to kick himself to the surface from such great depths. The ascent WAS the most dangerous part of the dive. His lungs re-expand, and he faced the possibility of shallow-water blackout, common among free-divers. Finally, Pipin exploded through the water's surface. The whole event took less than three minutes.



photo by Franklin J. Viola

— Betsy Archer



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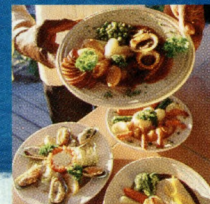
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▼ apollo EX Drysuit's Foot Valve

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Diver Down TankPak ►

Backaches from carrying your tank? With the new **TankPak**, you can easily carry, store and protect your tank in one bag. The adjustable, padded straps allow the tank to be carried on your back, freeing your hands. Durable Cordura protects your tank while an industrial zipper insures a snug fit. It is available in black with backpack straps in several popular colors. For more information, contact Diver Down at (800) 870-DIVE (3483).



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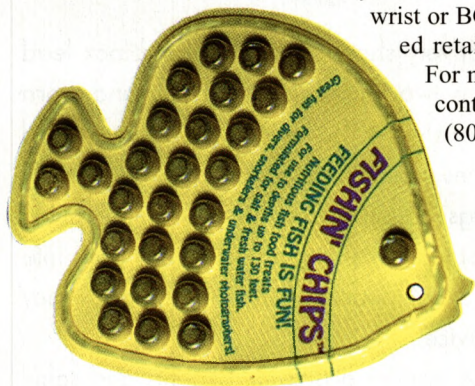
DEMA's (Diving Equipment and Marketing Association) annual trade show showed off its wares in New Orleans this past January. While the crawfish were plentiful and the jazz and blues equally as delightful, the number of innovative diving products seemed a bit thin. However, there were a few exceptions, which we've so conscientiously reviewed here in the following aptly named article, DEMA Roundup. From underwater phones to edible fish spuds, at least the variety of products was bountiful, even if the number of innovations were few. Read on and you may find at least one product to take you closer to your credit limit.

Oceanautix Multi-Pac ▶

If you're looking for more power and longer burn time, try the Oceanautix new **Multi-Pac** system available for lighting systems (great for cave and wreck diving) and video lighting. The basic unit includes a removable high-capacity industrial Nicad battery and charger. The battery units are tank mountable, compact, and rated to a depth of 200 feet. The quick connect/disconnect system makes it easy to use. Options include video lights with multi-position arms, a dual lighting system combination hand held/head mountable and a search light which is also hand held or head mountable. For more information, contact Oceanautix at (514) 329-5386 fax (514) 329-1698.

P.J. Noyes Fishin' Chips ▼

Now divers and snorkelers can play "feed the fish" and get closer to fish with new **Fishin' Chips**. Each packet contains 28 individual blisters of nutritious fish food treats. Because it is waterproof, the packet can be reused on multiple dives, and the remaining treats won't get soggy. The custom-designed lanyard can be attached to your wrist or BCD. The suggested retail price is \$3.95. For more information, contact P.J. Noyes at (800) 522-2469.



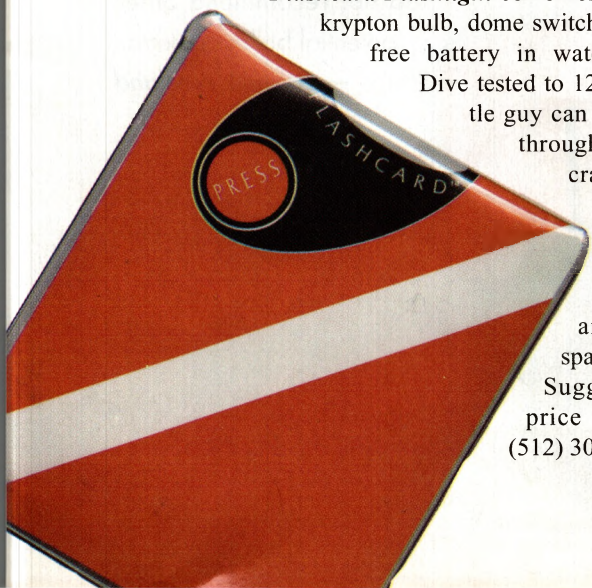
▼ S-Cubed Flashcard Flashlight

Inspector Gadget would love to put this wafer-thin lighting system up his sleeve. Weighing less than an ounce, this **Flashcard Flashlight** combines a super bright krypton bulb, dome switch and mercury-free battery in waterproof vinyl.

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Fuji Fit-Phone ▼

As cellular phones thrive above water, underwater communication continues to grow with a new contender, the **Fit-Phone** underwater communication system. The system is compact and lightweight. Three models are available. (The receiving-only unit will receive from any underwater transceiver and allows you to transmit via signal.) The underwater receiving/talking unit also incorporates a transmitting unit designed for use with a full face mask. The surface unit allows surface-to-diver, diver-to-surface and surface-to-surface transmission. The units can be purchased through Fuji Ultrasonic Engineering in Japan (81) 53-464-6460 fax (81) 53-465-3815. Fuji is looking for US dealers.



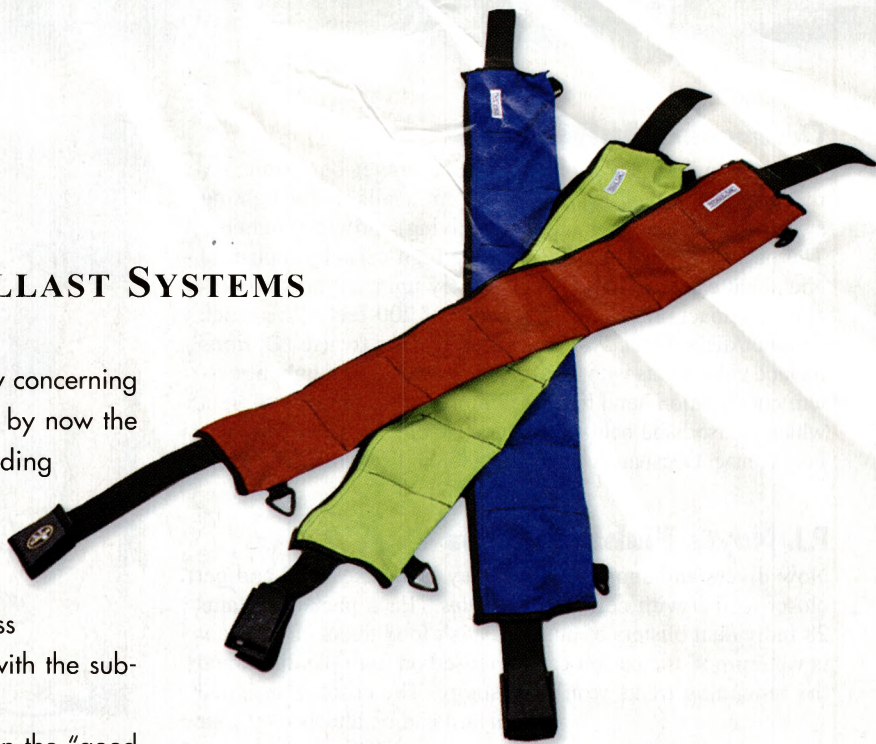
EQUIPMENT REVIEW

BLOCKS, BULLETS OR BB's

DIVERS BALLAST SYSTEMS

A lot has been written and discussed lately concerning the proper weighting of divers. Hopefully, by now the word is spreading, and divers are shedding pounds of excess ballast. But what of the ballast that remains? How can or should a diver carry those pounds of dense metal in order to achieve the nirvana state of bliss where diver and equipment become one with the sub-aquatic environment?

I have heard many tales of how it was in the "good old days." Divers are a resourceful lot, and many options for ballasting have arisen from that resourcefulness. Former military types have used melted down bullets poured into surplus cartridge pouches mounted on surplus cartridge belts. I have seen cylinder boots with lead melted into the bottoms and cylinders with lead ingots strapped to them. Equipment manufacturers have also tackled this problem, trying to find a better way to balance a diver underwater and win the hearts, minds and dollars of the diver. In the end, it comes



down to a relatively short list of options: block lead threaded onto a two inch nylon web belt and worn around the diver's waist, bullet-lead cylinders slipped into vinyl pouches mounted on a web belt, shot lead in small sealed bags that slip into pouches sewn to a nylon web belt or shot lead in small sealed bags that fit into special "quick drop" pouches built into the buoyancy compensator device.

Each of these options has some benefits and some drawbacks. So this month the questions we pose to our regional experts concern what type of weighting system they recommend to their divers and why. We will also find out why the experts do not recommend other potential ballast systems.

— Kevin J. Freeland



JENNIFER UHRY,
SAN DIEGO DIVERS SUPPLY,
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA.

I absolutely recommend that divers minimize their personal ballast system and use a weight-integrated buoyancy compensator device. The lead shot is softer and much more comfortable than any configuration that attaches it to the diver's waist. Such integrated systems have taken a few hard raps in the past as the systems are sometimes prone to malfunction and make it difficult for divers to rid themselves of ballast in an emergency situation. However, as a result of many new materials being used and a vast improvement in design, these systems are now nearly completely trouble free when properly maintained. Weight integrated BCs not only offer greater comfort but allow divers to reduce the amount of stuff they must keep track of and put on and off. The soft lead pouches are safer to use because if one is dropped, it will not damage the boat deck or the diver's foot. By using a weight integrated BC, we are one step closer to being free in the sea.

There are just a few drawbacks to integrated-weight systems. First, divers must realize that a BC will only hold a moderate amount of lead shot. Divers who must use very heavy weight to overcome extremely buoyant wetsuits or drysuits will probably have to augment the integrated weight in their BC with additional weight on a belt or harness. They must also be careful that the amount of weight integrated into the BC does not exceed the lifting capacity of the BC. Another drawback is cost. If divers already have a

BC, they will have to invest in a new integrated model. As of now, no one we are aware of has devised a way to retrofit an existing BC with an integrated system. As a rule, weight-integrated BCs tend to be in the middle to upper price ranges. The only other problem with using a weight-integrated BC is that it requires additional maintenance and cleaning. To insure that the system functions properly in an emergency situation, a diver *must* dismantle and clean the system often.

Regarding weight belts, I know lots of people who come home with huge bruises on their hips or with lower back pain caused by the constant pressure of their ballast system pulling at the small of their backs. Diving can be for everyone if trained well and equipped correctly. A weight-integrated buoyancy compensator device can make the difference to someone who may otherwise give up and take up cross stitch.

YOSHI HIGA,
SUN PACIFIC DIVE CENTER,
OKINAWA, JAPAN.

Our diving is tropical, and our water temperatures vary from the low 70s to the upper 80s. Most of our diving is done either with a very thin wetsuit or none at all. This means that we usually don't require much ballast to be comfortably neutral at depth. I prefer and recommend soft lead shot in pouches. Lead shot is simply much more comfortable than block lead. The soft pouches are pliable and easily conform to the diver's waistline. This virtually

eliminates the pinching and banging common with hard lead. This is especially true when divers are wearing very little insulation.

Lead shot has other attributes that make it desirable. One is added safety to both divers and equipment. It is not uncommon for someone to drop a weightbelt accidentally while donning or removing it. A six-pound block of lead can cause some pretty severe damage to a pinkie toe. Imagine the impact on your \$700.00 dive computer



when an eighteen-pound weightbelt comes sliding down the deck and pins it against the bulkhead. Another interesting thing I have discovered is that divers are more prone to fine tune and adjust their ballast when using a lead pouch system. The design of the belts is such that it minimizes the hassle of changing weights. A diver can just unzip the pouch of the belt and add or remove the appropriate amount of lead shot pouches.

Lead shot really has only two small drawbacks. One is the fact that the pouches must be cared for to insure that they do not suffer tears or punctures. A leaking pouch of shot is a real pain,

and care must be taken to insure that lead shot does not contaminate the environment or foul equipment. The other drawback is cost. Cost-conscious folks will find that they will have to invest roughly twice what they would in a block lead style belt.

Regarding weight-integrated buoyancy compensator devices, I am not inclined to approve of their use. Diver's are most likely to experience trouble at the beginning of or at the end of a dive. They are usually at or near the surface, and they are usually struggling to achieve positive buoyancy in the water. The divers' first line of defense is the release of their excess ballast. We teach them that if they are in trouble, they should remove and discard their weightbelt. I would venture to say that 99.9 percent of all divers learn the right-hand belt and buckle release technique that has been the standard for decades. I am concerned that divers not accustomed to the release techniques used in integrated systems will lose valuable time in responding to their needs. Another issue is maintenance. To insure proper operation, an integrated system needs to be maintained properly. It must be taken apart regularly, cleaned and reassembled properly. Failure to do this can lead to a malfunction at a critical moment. It is hard enough to get divers who use the standard belt and buckle to discard their belts in a rough situation; I just don't think the gain is worth the risk.

JIM BRAULT, NAPLES, ITALY

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block lead. Lead is easily obtainable and can be melted down and reformed with very little effort. Most remote-area dive destinations have to learn to be self sufficient and independent of outside suppliers as much as possible. I have my own lead molds and can produce several hundred pounds of block lead ingots in a day. I don't think that all divers need to make their own lead weights, but it just illustrates how easy block lead can be to obtain.

I teach that in an emergency, one of the first things divers should do is discard their weightbelt and establish positive buoyancy. I don't want one second of hesitation because of the amount of money about to be tossed away. A weight belt is expendable; a diver is not.

I do find that the lead-shot belts are more comfortable against the hips. This is usually most evident out of the water, however, it loses importance once a diver is submerged. The added comfort is great for delicate folks who bruise easily and who might otherwise not consider diving because of the discomfort. Personally, I do everything I can to minimize the amount of ballast my divers use.

I have not yet been impressed by the available integrated-ballast buoyancy compensator devices. I don't feel that they can handle the great amounts of ballast a very cold water diver must sometimes use. I also have problems with the various dumping systems and worry that the unfamiliarity of such systems could lead to a loss of valuable time during an emergency situation.

DAVID COLE,
AQUATIC ORIENTATIONS,
GULF BREEZE, FLORIDA

Divers should never wear more weight than they need. Our experience shows that the harder it is to adjust the amount of ballast, the more likely divers are to overweight themselves. Both shot lead pouches and bullet lead make it easy to slip in or take out a couple of extra pounds, depending on the diver's needs.

Integrated buoyancy compensators have come a long way, and I believe they are a viable option. I still would like to see a system designed that uses the principles and similar mechanics that all divers are being taught in their basic dive classes. Divers who choose these types of BCs need to practice, practice, practice the dumping of ballast. It must become a reflex action done without hesitation or confusion. If a diver is willing to take on the responsibility of self training and the added

necessary maintenance, then and only then would I recommend this option.

Block lead is okay and still a large part of our industry. About the best thing that can be said about block lead is that it is cheap. It certainly isn't pretty, and it never has been comfortable. I find that most divers today are very concerned with comfort and safety. More divers are upgrading their weightbelts and going with shot lead pouches for this reason.

KEVIN J. FREELAND,
SCUBA TIMES MAGAZINE

It's surprising how something so simple that most of us take for granted can be subject to such diverse opinions.

We dive to be free. Free from the pressures of our jobs. Free from the hassles and frustrations of modern society. Free from gravity. The better our sense of balance and the greater our mobility, the greater our freedom. As much as possible, our diving equipment needs to be unobtrusive. Less bulk, more versatility, more streamlined. Ballast doesn't keep us warm, doesn't help us breathe, doesn't keep track of time or gas absorption. Ballast can't help us swim or see better. It only serves one purpose, to counteract Archimedes' principles and allow us to remain neutral underwater more easily.

The soft-lead revolution is upon us, and more divers are choosing comfort and convenience over pure price. Companies such as Zeagle and SeaQuest are refining integrated BCs and making them more convenient and reliable to own and use.

Two recurring themes emerged from this issue's questions: One is that a diver should work hard to minimize the amount of ballast needed to dive. Weight yourself to be neutral at the end of your dive so that with your reserve gas supply and no air in your buoyancy compensator, you can hover at your precautionary decompression stop effortlessly. This will mean that you will be slightly negative at the beginning of your dive. The second idea is that divers need to be able to ditch their ballast system quickly and smoothly in order to assist them in becoming buoyant at the surface if an emergency were to arise.

Blocks, bullets or BBs, it's your choice. Find what works best for you and have a great dive. ■

Kevin Freeland is an STM contributing editor and dive store owner.



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1996 Liveaboard Chart Corrections:

See & Sea Travel's correct phone number is (800) DIV-XPRT/(800) 348-9778.

The *Don Jose* was omitted from the chart. This 80 foot liveaboard runs trips to La Paz, Baja Mexico. Cost: \$1395 for eight days. For more information call (800) 843-6967.



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GEARING UP FOR THE WEB SITE

BY WAYNE GETCHEL

In this issue, I would like to focus on the basics of acquiring access to the Internet, a sometimes difficult task for the novice as well as the accomplished computer user.

Preparing and initiating a “cyber-dive” on the Internet is not unlike diving in the water-world. In both cases, you need the right gear and knowledge.

Four very basic ingredients of what it takes to carry out a CYBER-DIVE:

1. Dial-up account
2. Modem program (Trumpet)
3. Email program (Eudora Pro)
4. Net browser (Netscape)

(I personally use Windows 3.1 and the programs listed above in parenthesis).

DIAL-UP ACCOUNT

First you need access to the Internet. You gain access to the Internet by opening a dial-up account with an Internet service provider. The service provider is a company who sells various types of access to the Internet. The most common type of account is a SLIP or PPP. Now, you are probably wondering, “How do I find a service provider?” If you currently are using AOL, CompuServe, or another online service, locate the www section, open the browser, and go to <http://thelist.com>. This www site is a comprehensive list of service providers throughout the world. If the online service is not an option for you, check with one of your friends. Chances are that you know someone with Internet access who will also be able to provide “newbie” help to you. Why don’t you just use an online service such as AOL? The answer is features (see Netscape below) and cost! The major online services charge you for time online. Hourly charges add up very quickly. You can receive an unwelcome surprise bill at the end of the month. I prefer to use a dial-up account with unlimited time at a flat fee of about \$20 per month.

TRUMPET

No, you do not need to be able jam with Dizzie Gillespie to access the Internet. Trumpet is a software program you use to dial your modem and connect to the Internet. Your service provider can

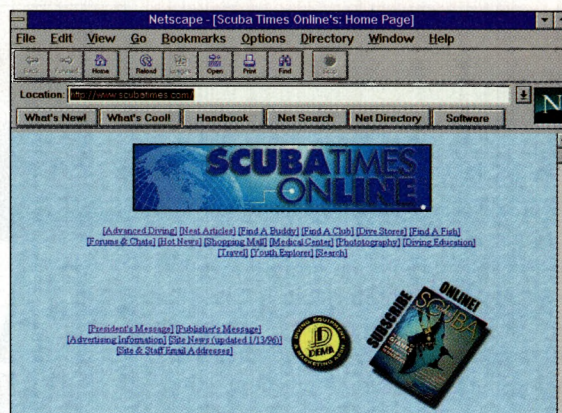
tell you where to obtain Trumpet (in most cases the service provider supplies customers with Internet software). The setup is where it gets tricky. You must fill in the correct settings (supplied by your service provider) in the Trumpet Network Configurations window (this is only required the first time you run Trumpet). Next, you may need to edit the LOGIN.CMD file (check with tech support at your service provider). This is a script that automatically dials your access number and logs you into your dial-up account. After you have filled in your settings, click OK. Your dialer is now set up.

EUDORA PRO

Email? What is email? Email is an electronic message sent via your computer over the telephone lines to a specified recipient. You can send email messages anywhere in the world. What about postage? The only charge for postage is the fee you are charged for your dial-up account. Wow! No extra charges for sending a message to Japan from the US? Right. It does not cost any more to send a message to the other side of the globe than it does to send a message to your neighbor across the street. There are two versions of Eudora, Shareware and Pro. The Shareware version is available on the Internet. I prefer to use Eudora Pro. Eudora Pro can be purchased from your local software retailer. The Pro version has added features including a spell checker. This program too, needs to be set up properly for you to be able to send and receive email. Go to the "setting" window and fill in your POP, real name, and return email address. Your Email program is now ready to use.

NETSCAPE WWW BROWSER

Get the most out of the WWW! At the time of this writing, the on-line services' (i.e., AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy) browsers do not support all of the advanced features available on the www. I prefer to use the latest version of Netscape. It can be obtained by clicking on the Netscape icon located on the *Scuba Times Online* home page. There are a



number of settings and optional add-on applications to be selected to complete the Netscape setup. For now, you only need to worry about setting your mail and news server information. You must have Trumpet running in the background before you can open Netscape. Run the Netscape program and find the “preferences” section. Locate the “mail and news” areas and fill in the appropriate information (this information is the same used in Trumpet and Eudora).

You've done it! You have passed the basic course (the "setup") and have been unofficially certified as a CYBER-DIVER. You should now be able to start diving on the World-Wide Web.

HELPFUL TIP

Give yourself a couple of days to get your system set up. The setup procedure is sometimes not the most user-friendly thing in the world. After you get things working, print out your TRUMKWSK.INI file, and write down your account's dial-up phone number, IP address, login name, password, mail server, news server, domain name, domain name servers, gateway address, and any other information your service provider gives you. Keeping a hard copy of your settings will insure ease in setting up another computer or starting from . . . OH NO! scratch, on a reformatted hard drive.

Where do I go from here?

Try starting your “cyber-dive” at the *Scuba Times Online* site at <http://www.scubatimes.com>. Navigating the Internet’s www is another subject I could discuss at great length. Let’s just say the Internet’s www is the most enormous iceberg in the world and you are chipping away at it with a safety pin. 

Wayne Getchell is the president of Internet Scuba, and site administrator of Scuba Times Online.

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Sunset House Cayman Dive Central

If you've never seen the much talked about yet elusive green flash associated with tropical sunsets, perhaps you've just had the wrong vantage point.



Your only chore is to stroll from your air-conditioned room overlooking the Caribbean Sea, down to the boarding area and climb into the dive boat of your choice.

One perfect viewing station for the green flash is at Grand Cayman's oldest dive resort, Sunset House, which for obvious reasons, faces west. Each evening at Sunset House's popular watering hole My Bar, you'll find relaxed divers gazing wistfully at the setting sun and hoping for their dance with the flash. If they miss it, they might blame the world-famous piña coladas or maybe their view was blurred by lingering visions of eagle rays gliding over a perfect Cayman wall. Yet, even if you get skunked by the flash seven nights in a row, you're sure to fill a dive bag with incredible memories during your stay.

For divers looking for one-stop dive shopping, Sunset House is simply a diving Shangri La. Everything you need is at your fingertips. There are seven well-designed dive boats, one being the impressive 50-foot power catamaran *Manta*, which jets advanced divers to the pristine East End wall dives in total comfort. This fleet of boats allows you to dive any site on the island. Your only chore is to stroll from your air-conditioned room over-



looking the Caribbean Sea down to the boarding area and climb into the dive boat of your choice. Perhaps you'd like to do a wall dive today. Maybe Stingray City is the menu item you've chosen. Whatever your choice, the professional dive staff will look after your every need. No problem, mon.

For the underwater photographer, Sunset House has the famous Cathy Church Photo Centre located right on the premises. Church, an award-winning photographer with hundreds of photos in print, is also one of diving's top

photo instructors, having taught underwater photography for over 20 years. In addition to instruction, the Photo Centre is truly full service, providing everything from film purchase to overnight developing to a full-blown, week-long photo course. Plenty of rental camera gear is available, and expert advice flows like a strong tide.

Between two main activities at Sunset House, diving and sleeping, is a third popular procedure, eating. While My Bar serves up a mean menu from the grill, complete with burgers, fish and chips and the like, Sunset's gourmet restaurant Seaharvest is popular island wide. The restaurant is located next to the fresh water pool and jacuzzi. It was undoubtedly planned that way so divers could exit the restaurant, flop down in the pool and let their food settle and their tissues off gas.

That's the way it is at Sunset House. It's laid out with the vacationing diver in mind. Nothing is too far away, but there's plenty of room to stretch your legs or find a secluded corner for a romantic interlude. To say Sunset House is a well-rounded resort is the classic understatement. With unlimited shore diving and boat diving, two restaurants, seven dive boats, a world-class photo center, a gift shop and, of course, a full service dive shop, Sunset House provides divers with every option imaginable. Plus, the resort is a short distance (it's walkable) to downtown Georgetown and all the action you care to take in.

The only thing the folks at Sunset House can't guarantee is the green flash. But, if you spend enough time at My Bar, you'll see plenty of sights that are sure to delight.

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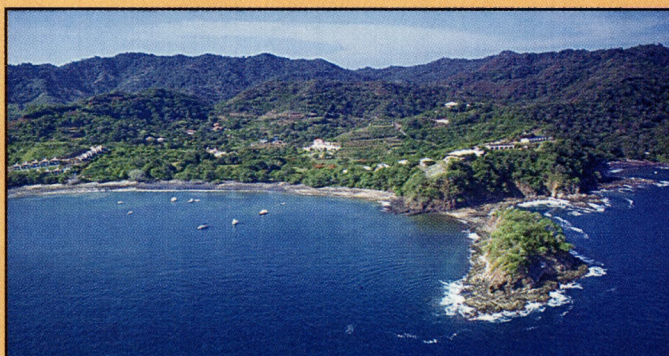


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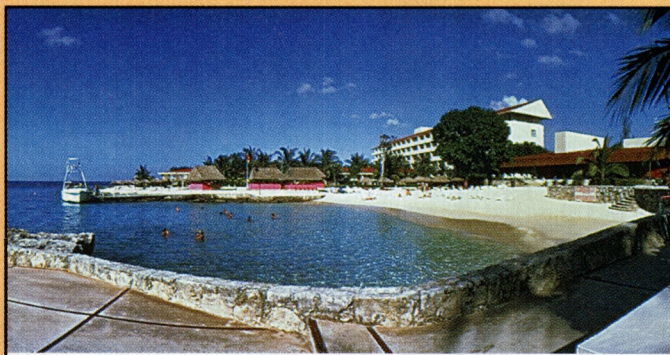
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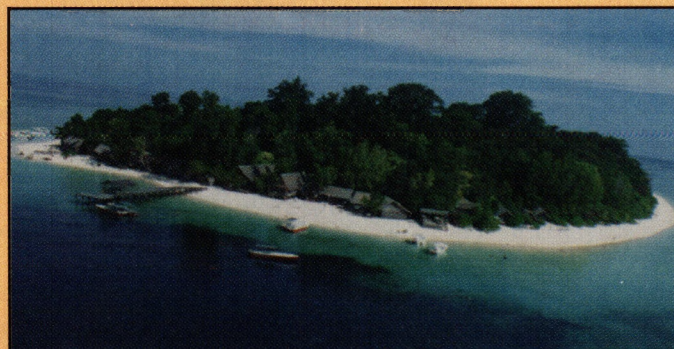
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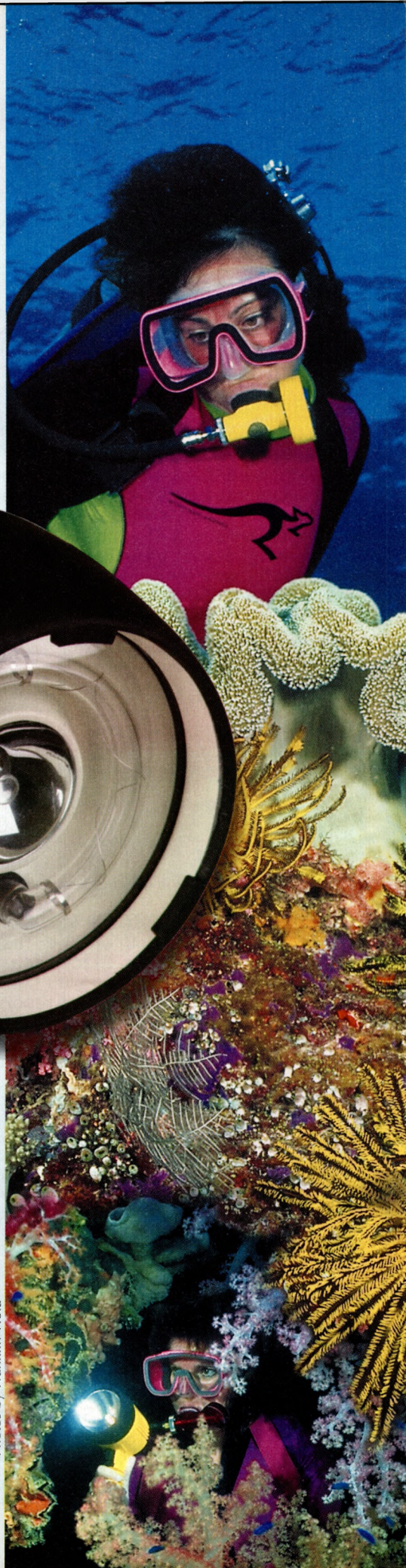
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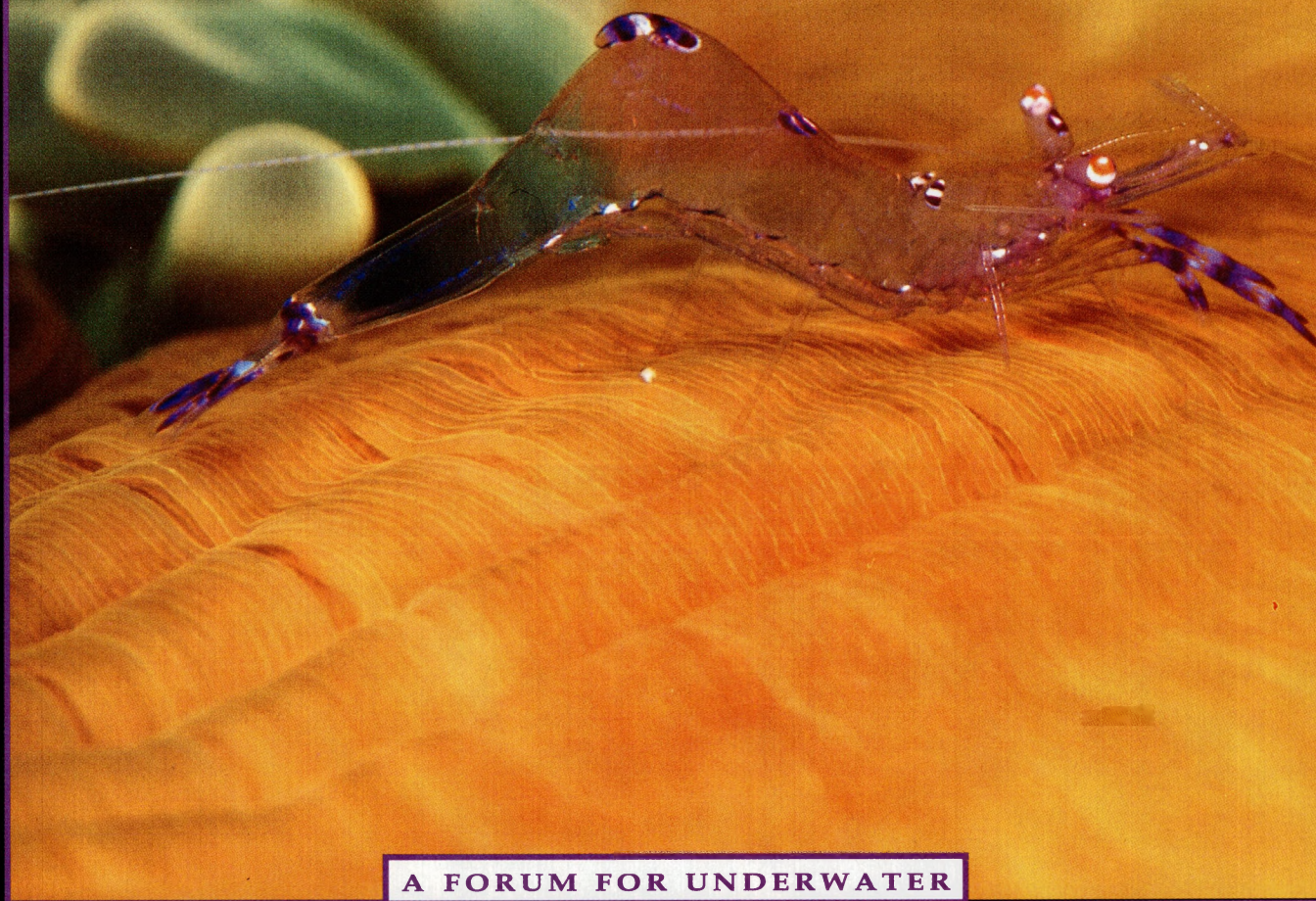
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Underwater	38
Firing Modes	TTL Auto, Manual
Color Temperature	4800 degrees K
Power Settings	Full, 1/2, 1/4, 1/8
Power Source	Ni-Cad Module
Flashes (full power)	160
Recycle Time	2 sec.
Audible Ready Signal	Yes
Modeling Light	Yes
LED Film Gauge	Yes

Photos by Franklin Viola



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A FORUM FOR UNDERWATER
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Both ornate and delicate, this tiny, inch-long *Pericilimenes* shrimp dances across its host sea anemone. This is but one of the thousands of dazzling miniature creatures that is on display in the taxonomically diverse waters of Papua New Guinea. Gregory Brown is a frequent contributor to *Scuba Times Magazine* and his book *Through The Ocean Window*, based on coral reefs throughout the world, will be available late in 1997. He is by no means a shrimp in the industry.



P O R T F O L I O

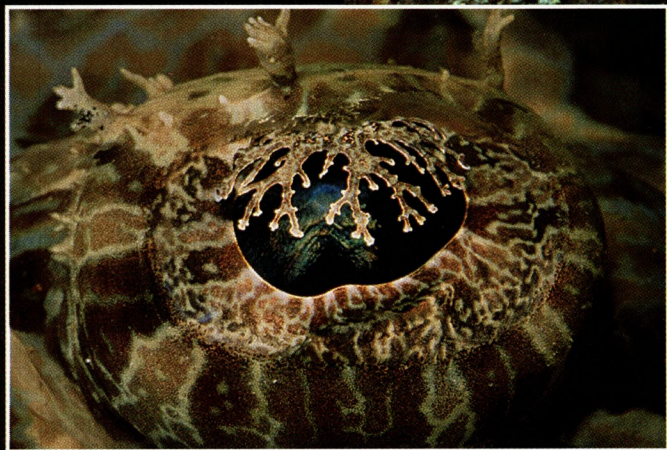
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SURF AND TURF

BY W. GREGORY BROWN

In the truest sense, it represents one of the planet's final frontiers... a destination that may well bring us our last glimpse of an intact reef ecosystem. I was about to move on when the water erupted with frenetic activity. I heard the familiar "whomp" sound. You know, the sound large congregations of fish make as they simultaneously rush to escape incoming predators. I looked up. There were grey reef sharks, jacks, barracuda and snapper racing about the reef at break-neck speeds. It was total chaos... for all ten seconds, the sharks chased everything that moved. I remained perfectly still. Then all was quiet and calm. Everything was gone! Jacks, cudas, snapper, sharks — simply vanished. It was over as quickly as it had begun. In the wake of this melee, a beautifully decorated stonefish emerged from beneath a large table coral (right). It was the most colorful specimen I have ever encountered. A worthy photographic subject indeed. And it turn out that things were just beginning to heat up around Asop Sep.





In the days that followed, I would have the pleasure of photographing several of nature's underwater oddities including a small school of neon blue hippo tang fluttering in and out of the coral (bottom page 62) and an extremely close encounter (eye-to-eye you might say) with a magnificent crocodile fish (above). This in conjunction with an incredible array of wide angle delights. What I didn't see were other divers or, for that matter, any other boats. No trash littered the reefs. No nets were tangled in the coral. There were neither fish traps nor anchor damage. Only pristine, underwater wilderness — one of the few remaining sanctuaries on earth.

Following the "surf" part of my journey, I headed for some fascinating PNG "turf." The Southern Highlands of New Guinea is home to the Huli Wigmen, one of the world's most culturally intact tribes. In the Tari Region, at 7,000 feet, the Hulis lead a simple life steeped in tradition against the backdrop of the cool lush mountain rainforests. From spectacular waterfalls to eye-popping Huli Spirit Dances, this secret land is but another facet of the magnificent, natural jewel we call Papua New Guinea. ▀



THERE REALLY IS LIFE EAST OF CALIFORNIA NORTH CAROLINA'S WWII GRAVEYARD

BY MARTY SNYDERMAN

Looking down the hull of the submarine, I became engulfed by a school of baitfish. Silver flashes everywhere, they circled and swirled in perfect synchronization. The school was so dense and the motion so frantic that I bordered on the edge of disorientation.



Mr. Overhead, Artist/Cartographer Eric Hutcheson documenting the wreck for his detailed drawings.

Suddenly, the school vanished, and once again the hull of the submarine appeared. Open hatches, a deck gun, and the conning tower were clearly visible. My thoughts focused on the history of this weapon of destruction. Today she rests on the sea floor, just over 30 miles off the coast of North Carolina's pristine Outer Banks. An underwater Disneyland, a diver's dream come true. But until she was sent to her watery grave, the German submarine, known

simply as the *U-352*, was a real life nightmare for the mariners of America's merchant marine fleet operating along the East Coast of the United States during World War II.

I suppose that somewhere in the long unused recesses of my mind, I had stored the knowledge that German subs had terrorized the East Coast during World War II. I had been taught that the subs sank dozens of ships operated by the US Merchant Marine in waters immediately off the east coast of the United States. But when I thought of wreck diving and World War II, my thoughts headed west to Truk Lagoon in Micronesia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.

For years my North Carolina diving pals have raved about the famed "Graveyard of the Atlantic." They called it a diving mecca. Swore it was another Truk. The wrecks, they promised, swarmed with marine life, not to mention incredibly fascinating history.

But every time I considered making a trip from my home in San Diego to North Carolina, I looked at a map and reaffirmed my belief that I was born to go west. I didn't say I was born smart. I just had this fixation about the

West Coast and the expanse beyond. It isn't that I didn't appreciate their invitations, but for years I thought of the kelp forests of Southern California and places like Truk, Fiji, Costa Rica's Cocos Island, Papua New Guinea, and Australia as the true wreck-diving meccas.

When you boiled it down to the bare bones, I was just too dumb or too stubborn to consider the facts. But finally Tom, Jean, and Mr. Overhead, the main caver himself, Eric Hutcheson, talked me into heading east. And I am truly glad they did.

Looking at the *U-352*, I felt my stomach tighten. It was the same sensation I had experienced the first time I visited the wrecks in Truk. Someone else's hell on earth was my diving entertainment for a day. I knew I had a good photo opportunity in front of me, but I was absolutely disgusted by the origins of my pleasure. I wondered momentarily what it must have been like to be a 19-year-old German youth confined to life aboard a submarine trying to kill people he didn't even know. I wondered mostly about the Americans who had died so that I might enjoy the freedom to scuba dive and photograph marine wildlife for a living.



I remember thinking to myself, "Damn all wars," just as it became obvious why the baitfish had scattered only moments before. Bigger fish, bonito, were in hot pursuit. A thick school of the tuna-like predators raced past me in the direction of the fleeing baitfish. Only seconds later, two dozen amberjack appeared. I suppose they were following both baitfish and bonito.

My thoughts of history and war were back-burnered. I had photographer's disease, an ailment that plays havoc with the quality of my photography. I wanted 36 perfect shots of 36 different subjects all on the same dive. But I never had a prayer of getting them all on a single dive.

My thoughts scattered, and I wasn't really able to do justice to my subject matter. Back on the surface, I sat down and had a little talk with myself. Go slow, stay focused, don't be greedy. Enjoy the experience one scene at a time. It all made sense while basking in the North Carolina sun, but as soon as I hit the water, I was once again being torn by whether or not to photograph the wrecks, the marine wildlife, or both. This photographer's ailment was North Carolina Wreck Diver's Affliction. I have experienced this photographer's plight before, but it only happens in places where the diving is terrific.

I had been invited to make the trip by fellow writers and photographers Tom Morissey and Jean Pierce. I eagerly accepted their invitation, based on the premise that any dive is better than another day spent pounding my computer. But I had no idea that I would become so enamored with the

diving. Tom and Jean had assured me I would have fun, but they didn't tell me I'd fall in love. I did.

Like a lot of other divers who don't reside in the Tar Heel state, I had made the mistake of discounting this domestic destination. I suppose I considered it to be a poor man's vacation. I fell prey to the thinking that the farther west I traveled, the more time on a plane and the more money I spent, the better the diving would be.

I had spent the latter part of my childhood and the early part of my adult life trying to figure out how to get to the West Coast. I wanted to be closer to Diving Central. As far as I was concerned, the movies were right. California was the center of the universe,

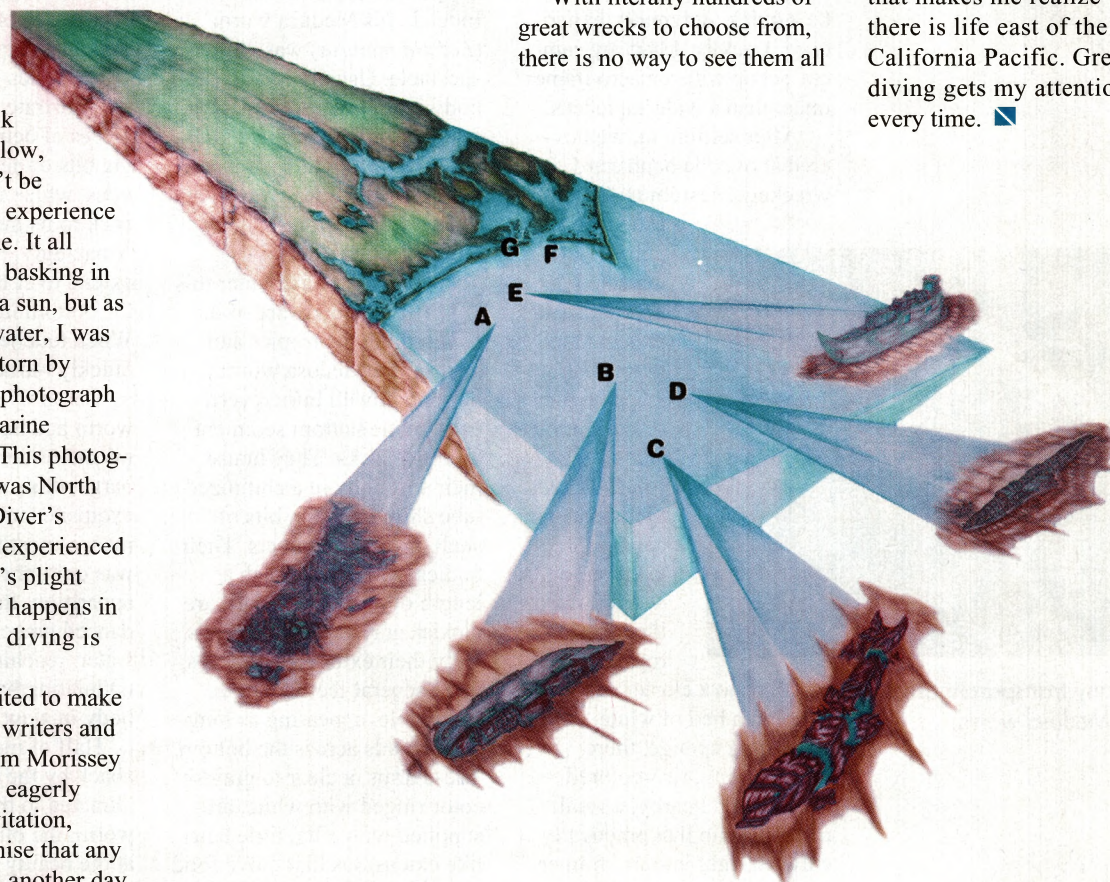
and Californians were a superior species. After all, they had the Dodgers, Disneyland, Yosemite, Hollywood, the Channel Islands and my grandmother Nana. How much proof could a kid need?

But for Tom, Jean and Eric's persuasion, I might never have known what I have been missing. Diving out of Carteret County, North Carolina, we enjoyed five days of ship wrecks, history lessons, marine wildlife, barbecue, solitude, and hospitality that were every bit as much fun and fascinating as all the western sites I have ever dived. Along with the wrecks, big barracuda, sand tiger sharks, sandbar sharks, turtles, bonito, jacks, grouper, and spotted eels were the featured attractions.

With literally hundreds of great wrecks to choose from, there is no way to see them all

in a single visit. But we were able to explore many of the more high profile sites. In addition to the *U-352*, we dived the *Papoose*, a once proud tanker now known for its resident population of sand tiger sharks; the tanker *W.E. Hutton* which teems with marine life, as does another inshore wreck, the *Indra*; and a recently created artificial reef, the wreck of the *Aeolus*. Each has a unique history and its own appeal. All of this with 60 plus feet of visibility and 80 degree water temperatures. The wrecks are a bit on the deep side, but they are certainly within sport-diving limits. As far as I can tell, the only thing the area lacks is its fair share of publicity.

Every once in a while, something happens in my life that makes me realize that there is life east of the California Pacific. Great diving gets my attention every time. ■



North Carolina Ship Wrecks Illustration by Eric Hutcheson

A The W.E. Hutton **B** The Aeolus **C** The Papoose **D** The U-352
E The Indra **F** Beaufort Inlet **G** Morehead City



THE MEDUSA WORM

IN FULL VIEW

BY TONI PARRAS

Preparing for a secondary dive site after a deep wreck off Miami Beach, I didn't have any great expectations for that particular spot. Indeed, as my buddy Trish and I descended through the silty water to a broken-up barge lying amidst scattered cement pipes in 50 feet of water, I believed it would be a quick and murky experience. Luckily, I had my camera set up with a macro framer rather than a wide angle lens.

After settling in, we hovered above the haphazard wreckage, searching for interesting bits of debris. My expected disappointment was gradually overcome by awe. On one of the smokestacks, I found incredible encrusting sponges of every color — yellow, blood red, royal blue.



The many transparent arms of the Medusa worm.

Close to a cluster of tunicates on a bed of white encrusting sponge, there grazed a tiny, rust-colored shrimp, and nearby, a small pencil urchin that practically crawled right into my framer. On the rubble bottom next to the wreckage, we found an enormous Florida horse conch, a shell collector's

prize, alive and well.

The catch came when I heard Trish's underwater scream. I swam over atop the main hulk of the barge to find her playing with a curious, twisting creature. Its many transparent arms wriggled about, and its long banded body curled up protectively. Indeed, this Medusa worm (*Loimia medusa*) was quite a spectacle. Usually hiding its body in rocky grooves, revealing only its milky, ringed tentacles in search of food particles, this individual was out in full view, its soft pink body writhing on the deck.

Divers often encounter this worm yet are unaware of it. Common in the tropics and subtropics, Medusa worms normally dwell vertically in the bottom sediment or under rocks. They house their soft body in a chitinized tube shrouded with bits of shell or rock fragments. Their bodies, which can reach a length of up to six inches, are pinkish gray with white bands. Only their extended tentacles, up to several feet in length, are visible, appearing as long thin threads across the bottom. These arms, a clear to grayish color ringed with white, are supplied with cilia, little hair-like extensions that move food particles towards the mouth.

Distant relatives of the more elegant feather duster and Christmas tree worms, the

Medusa is a segmented worm in the family Terebellidae. This sedentary polychaete is a tube-dwelling worm which lives out its life burrowed in sand or mud bottoms. Similar to the filter-feeding mode of feather duster worms, which use their branched tentacles to catch food particles off the ocean currents, the Medusa worm is a detritus feeder. That is, it spreads its arms out over the substrate and picks up tiny pieces of detritus, decomposing bits of dead plants or animals, which it then carries back to its mouth via cilia. Amazingly, its tentacles can extend over three feet across the bottom in search of food. When touched, these tentacles quickly retract into the tube.

Certainly, the Medusa worm had never before caught my attention. However, on the barge, this one seemed to me exquisite and frail. Our specimen, almost four inches long, was quite the captivating apparition. Its gossamer arms danced gracefully in the silent water, reaching out and then undulating back towards its body in slow motion.

Half of me was a bit taken aback by the fact that I was attracted to this squiggling worm; the other half marveled at the beauty of this strange creature, at its vivid yet soft colors. Indeed, the small wonders of the sea never cease to amaze and delight me. ■

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PHOTO Q & A

BY SCOTT FRIER

QUESTION

I am planning to buy an underwater housing for my 35mm SLR camera. Do you have any tips or recommendations? Is there anything special I should look for?

ANSWER

Buying an underwater housing is like buying a new car; it's a very seldom and expensive purchase. There are also a number of options to consider so that it really depends on what the system is primarily going to be used for. Housings appear to be basically the same, a waterproof box to take your above-water camera underwater. There are, however, a number of very important differences that you should consider when deciding which housing is for you.

The viewfinder, without a doubt, is the most important consideration when selecting a housing. The main reason to use a single lens reflex (SLR) in an underwater housing is to have the ability to see through the lens that is taking the photograph. This means accurate framing and focusing. If the housing doesn't allow you to see the whole viewfinder easily and clearly, including exposure information, then you have defeated your main reason for buying the housing. Make sure you have your mask on when looking through the viewfinder of any system you're considering.

A few professional model

SLR cameras have the option of changing the prism to an "action" style model. This type of finder has a very large viewing area and is ideal for underwater housings. The alternative is a series of adapter lens either built into the housing or screwed onto the camera's eye piece. These systems vary widely in their effectiveness, so take the time to try your camera in the housing.

Most housings cut off the ambient light that illuminates the information in the viewfinder. Check the housing you are considering to make sure that it offers either an internal light to illuminate the camera's viewfinder information or has a convenient method of turning on the viewfinder illuminator built into some cameras.

The port is the part of the housing the lens looks through. Different lenses need different ports. Wide-angle lenses use dome ports, and micro lenses use flat ports. Buying a port for each lens can get very expensive, not to mention burdensome to travel with. Look for a housing system that will allow you to use one port for several lenses.

Most port lenses are made of acrylics like Lexan. While very strong, this material tends to scratch easily. Some housing companies offer optical glass lenses as an option for their flat ports. Glass is very resistant to scratching and while it costs a bit more, it is well worth it

in the long run.

Check which camera controls the housing will allow you to access. There may be specific functions you would like to use on your camera that certain housings may not have controls for. At the very least, you should be able to access shutter, aperture, exposure mode and auto/manual focus. In short, the more camera controls you can access, the more flexible the housing.

Make sure any housing you consider offers a connection (bulkhead) to the type of flash you are using.

Construction and materials are important as well. I have found the best housings are made of aluminum and have gear systems that are either metal or Delron®. Poorly made or designed gears can slip, causing the control to bind.

Last, consider availability to parts and service. There is nothing more frustrating than needing a part and having to wait months for it.

Take your time. Try out any housings that you are considering. At the very least, try working with them in the store. Keep in mind that with housings, like so many other things, you get what you pay for.

QUESTION

I have been thinking about taking a course in underwater photography, yet there seem to be so many offered I'm not sure which to take. Do you have any advice?





ANSWER

The easy answer would be simply to say take one given by me, but that would be unfair and would vastly limit your options. There are a lot of very good courses. The best type, of course, is a multi-day class, given in a dive destination that can provide both good diving and a good learning environment. The ability to have a class and then go diving to practice what you've learned really speeds up the learning curve. Keep in mind, however, that your goal is to learn underwater photography, so the content of the course should take priority over where it is given. An exotic dive destination does not necessarily mean a good course.

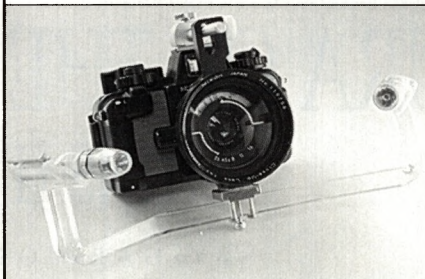
Find out a little bit about the instructor's background. Being a good photographer does not guarantee being a good teacher and communicator. A number of years ago, I went to a lecture by one of the world's pre-eminent topside photographers, yet the man could not string two sentences together to make a point. Also, just because somebody has had a few photographs published and owns a lot of equipment does not make him an experienced and knowledgeable underwater photographer. Anybody can have a business card printed.

Ask the instructor or the booking agent for any underwater photo classes for an outline of the course. Make sure it covers everything you want to know. If you are a beginner, be sure any course you take covers the basics of both photography and underwater photography. Check the number of actual classroom hours. If it's less than 14 hours, chances are you aren't going to get much for your dollar. Class size is also important. The smaller the class, the more individual attention you are going to get. I'd avoid a class of more than 14 students unless there is an assistant.

If you like liveboards, many offer week-long photo courses by well-known photo pros. The course should also offer daily E-6 processing of your film. Being able to see your work and evaluate it with the instructor right after you shoot it is really the most effective way to speed up learning. Working with transparency (slide) film is less forgiving than print film and will give you a better idea of how you are doing. ■

Mail your photo questions to Scott Frier, c/o Scuba Times Magazine, 14410 Perdido Key Drive, Pensacola, Florida 32507.

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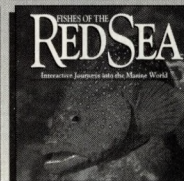
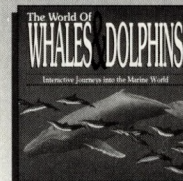
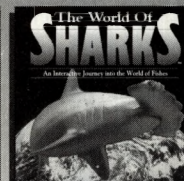
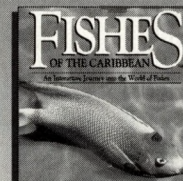
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AURA OF THE FLAMINGO WINS IT ALL

BY GARY GOOLSBY

Digital imaging is the latest tool to capture the imagination of photographers who wish to unleash their creative energy. Many times, I have watched the judging of the SeaSpace Photographic Competition in Houston. The special effects category always caught my interest. When I tried to reproduce these effects, the results were always disappointing, but my love for these images was not diminished.

background would be eliminated and the flamingo tongue would fill the frame. The cropping tool permits you to select a rectangular area to be enlarged and set the cropping size. The computer did its magic, and in about 20 minutes, I had a new cropped image on the screen.

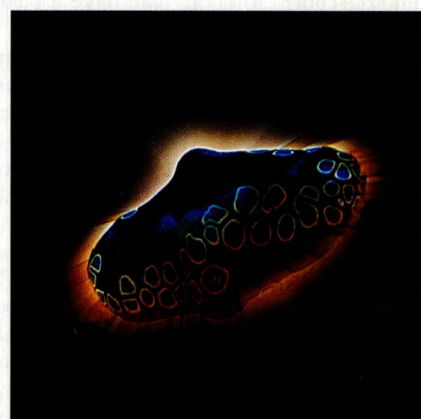
Next, I used the program to eliminate the backscatter found on many underwater slides. The clone tool enables

into prominence, it was time to experiment with the filters included with the program. I was determined to take this elementary shot and make it into something unusual and different.

The point acceleration filter alters the image to look like the photographer zoomed a telephoto lens just as the photograph was snapped, thus producing a streaked image. I experimented with different



The three steps to the first place winning *Aura of the Flamingo*



Reviewing my underwater slides, I selected a hundred of my best or favorite slides and had a photo CD made. When making the photo CD, Kodak scans each slide at five resolutions and saves these as files on the CD. The flamingo tongue was included on this first CD. Originally, I only intended to clean up the image. I wanted to crop the slide, so that some of the

you to copy a small portion of the image to other areas of the image. It can be used as a paintbrush which paints with the image instead of a color. With this tool, I painted the water over the backscatter. The same method is used to clean or retouch old photographs. This took me about 20 minutes. Now that the backscatter had been eliminated and the subject brought

settings until the image looked the way I wanted. This experimenting took about four hours. Unlike my previous attempts at special effects, I had complete control of the process. I could generate the output to the screen, alter the settings and fine tune the image until I was satisfied with the image on the screen.

My plan was to superimpose the zoomed image over

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Gilliam's Sea Tales
Outside the Shark Cage
In the Jaws of a Bull
Attack of the Killer Barnacles
Bob Talbot: Life's Lessons

CLOSE CALLS

The School of Hard Knocks: Part I

When we think of a the great white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, we think of danger. This ideology has been embedded in our minds through *JAWS* and *Shark Week* and is the ideal starting point for this two part series of articles in which our authors tell breath-taking tales of dangerously close calls.

— Photo by Marty Snyderman

BRET GILLIAM • ADJ EDITOR



Veteran Sea Stories

BYOB

We were so wrapped up in our conversation that we failed to realize that diners in the far corners had actually gotten to their feet and moved closer, hanging on every word.

I guess it should be no surprise that divers enjoy a good adventure story. In fact, if conversations around the bar at dive resorts or during the sun-down cocktail hours on liveaboard are any baseline measurement, most divers actually exist with the sole purpose of either hearing or relating the best tall tales. This section was conceived by Fred Garth, *Scuba Times* publisher, after he remembered a dinner the two of us had in an upscale restaurant where we were probably the only divers among the rest of the suits and Junior League trophy wives nursing their \$100 a plate entrees.

The evening started slowly, and we dispensed with some obligatory editorial business as we made our way through the escargot and nouveaux riche pastries. We had done some serious damage to two bottles of a fine young California Beaujolais when we both started relating some dive yarns about past experiences. I was most of the way through a harrowing account of a shark attack I'd survived about 20 years prior when I paused briefly upon discovering that we had abruptly run out of wine.

Fred looked around to wave the wine steward over to discover that the entire restaurant was collectively holding its breath for the big finish. Apparently, my less than reserved story-telling voice had carried sufficiently to capture everyone's attention. We were so wrapped up in our conversation that we failed to realize that diners in the far corners had actually gotten to their feet and moved closer, hanging on every word. Even the waiters and the maitre d' were clustered next to our potted palm, sucking up our spirited exchange like tuxedoed vultures.

Fred held up the empty wine bottle, and a stampede ensued by our newest friends to buy us a fresh case if we wanted, but whatever you do, finish the damn story! We both felt a little like E.F. Hutton.

I resumed the account, Fred poured the wine, and a good time was had by all. One very dignified couple came by later to say they hadn't enjoyed a story-telling session like that since *Prairie Home Companion*. Never mind that Fred thought *Prairie Home Companion* was a country & western band; I knew a compliment when I heard one.

Now, some six years later, Fred had an epiphany of

sorts after another lengthy story-telling session with some of our regular writers who were well fueled with a particularly compelling brandy. And I guess some sort of light bulb went on in his head (of course, that's pure metaphor since it would have exploded given the fumes occupying the same cranial space), and he said, "Let's do a whole *Advanced Diving Journal* section with stories like these. The readers will love it." Then he slumped face down in his cherries jubilee.

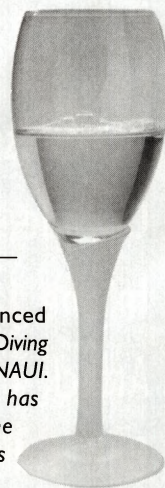
But I remembered his suggestion after reviving him and putting out the smoldering fire in his eyebrows with Marty Snyderman's shirt tail. And, even with the scrutiny of complete sobriety, I had to agree that he was on to something. So we handed out assignments to a diversified collection of the diving industry's veterans who have been around long enough to have at least one good story to tell. We asked for our writers to share their most memorable "hair raising adventure in diving" in 1,500 words or less. Easy enough, right? Carl Roessler had so many we had to have him itemize his collection before settling on a great white shark lesson.

We ended up with enough good material for two issues of the *ADJ*. Our first offerings are contained here with submissions from Carl Roessler, Marty Snyderman, Doug Perrine, Karl Shreeves and an interview with Bob Talbot. We hope you'll find this an interesting departure from our usual more technical focus, but it's all very definitely in keeping with our advanced diver themes.

There are lessons to be learned from some stories, a laugh to be shared along the way in others, and some don't have a happy ending. But they're real. And that's the criteria Fred had in mind when he commissioned this special edition.

Stay tuned for more next time, including my relation of the story that started this whole thing off. And you won't even have to buy the wine. ■

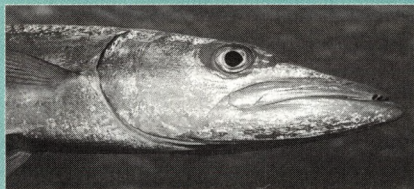
Bret Gilliam is editor of the *Advanced Diving Journal*, President of *Technical Diving International* and Vice Chairman of *NAUI*. Since beginning diving in 1958, he has logged over 14,000 dives around the world. He considers his most hazardous time spent in bars with Fred Garth.



BY BRET C. GILLIAM

An Accident Waiting to Happen

When I was an officer in the US Merchant Marine, one of the salty old captains I sailed with explained to me how and why most accidents occur. "Accidents," he said, "mostly happen due to fatigue and boredom." Unfortunately, this point usually isn't recalled until after the fact.



On a trip to Grand Cayman with some of my dive mates, this fact became a reality for me during a night dive on Waldo's Reef. We wanted to find the famous, big, green moray eel the site was named after, and we hoped to see its other local celebrity, a four-foot barracuda aptly named Snaggletooth that divers often feed by hand.

I was the first diver in the water and was getting bored waiting for the herd. I imagined myself in a light-saber duel with Darth Vader by slicing the dark ink with the narrow beam of my torch. Although the frantic-like signal of my light did not send those on the beach into an all-out rescue attempt, it did attract the attention of Snaggletooth.

His huge silvery body caught both my curiosity and the powerful beam of my torch as I proceeded to spotlight him like a deer. I knew for the most part that accounts of barracudas striking shiny objects (such as a diver's watch or other jewelry) were not stories of lore. However, my brain must have been asleep.

Whap! Off came my mask from a direct blow to the face. In a split-second, another strike hit me like a short-arm punch in the middle of my horse-collar BC. Somehow I caught the mask with my right hand and simultaneously squelched the torch by inverting its beam against my chest, hoping to deter any further blows.

Whether the fall-off from the torch lit my mask like a shiny mirror or whether Snaggletooth had simply had a bad day, there was no excuse for my stupidity. Fortunately, he hit my mask square on. A few inches lower, and my cheek would have looked like hamburger.

I tried to hide my embarrassment from the others, but they knew something was up when I insisted on rinsing out my wet-suit in private. Surely my old captain had not acquired his respect for "accidents waiting to happen" without some first-hand knowledge.

— by Franklin J. Viola

photo by Franklin J. Viola

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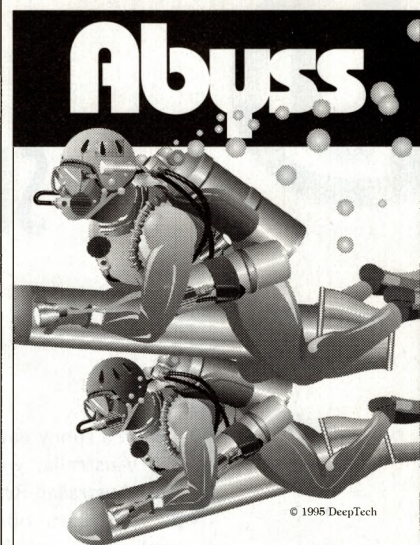
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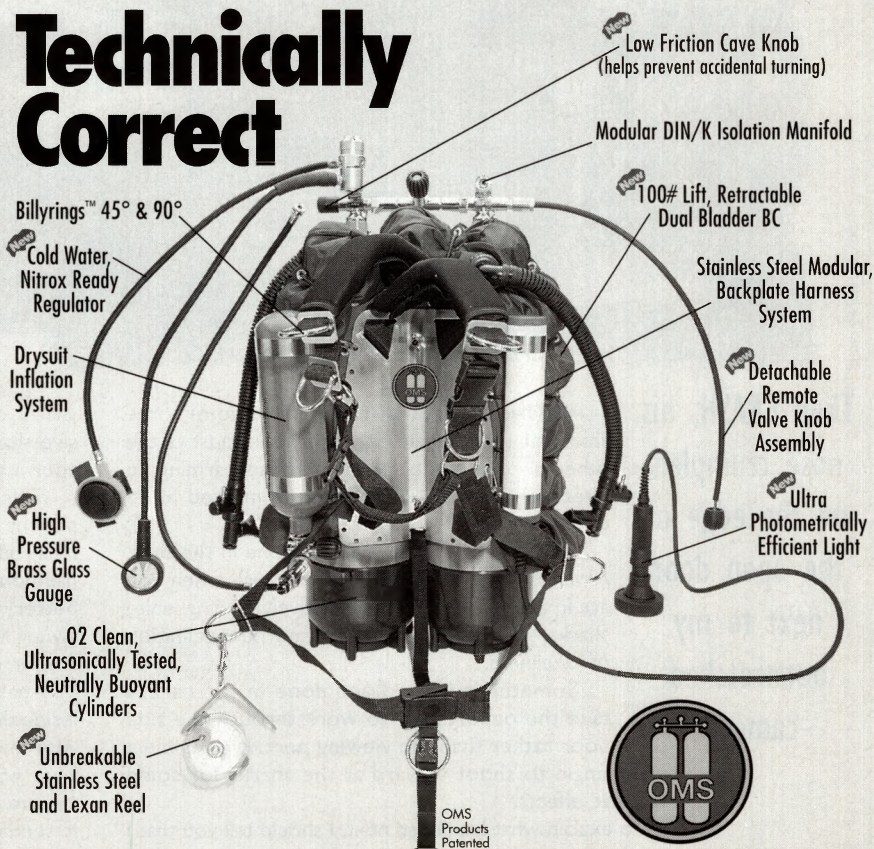
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Shark on the Outside

Me on the. . ? Outside!

On a sunny day off the Neptune Islands in South Australia, we were anchored where famed Australian Rodney Fox and I have, for the past 20 years, offered divers face-to-face encounters with the great white shark *Carcharodon carcharias*. Since I run the trips, I get to choose who is the tour escort; it may not surprise you to know that I have taken 20 of these trips.

have spent over 400 hours in those cages during my 20 expeditions. I have observed the behavior and guessed at the moods of perhaps 200 great white sharks. Usually, after a few hours with a shark, I can tell if he or she is hungry or not, aggressive or not, sneaky or not. Then I adjust my actions to get better pictures.

With really aggressive sharks around, you merely keep all your body parts completely within the cage. The

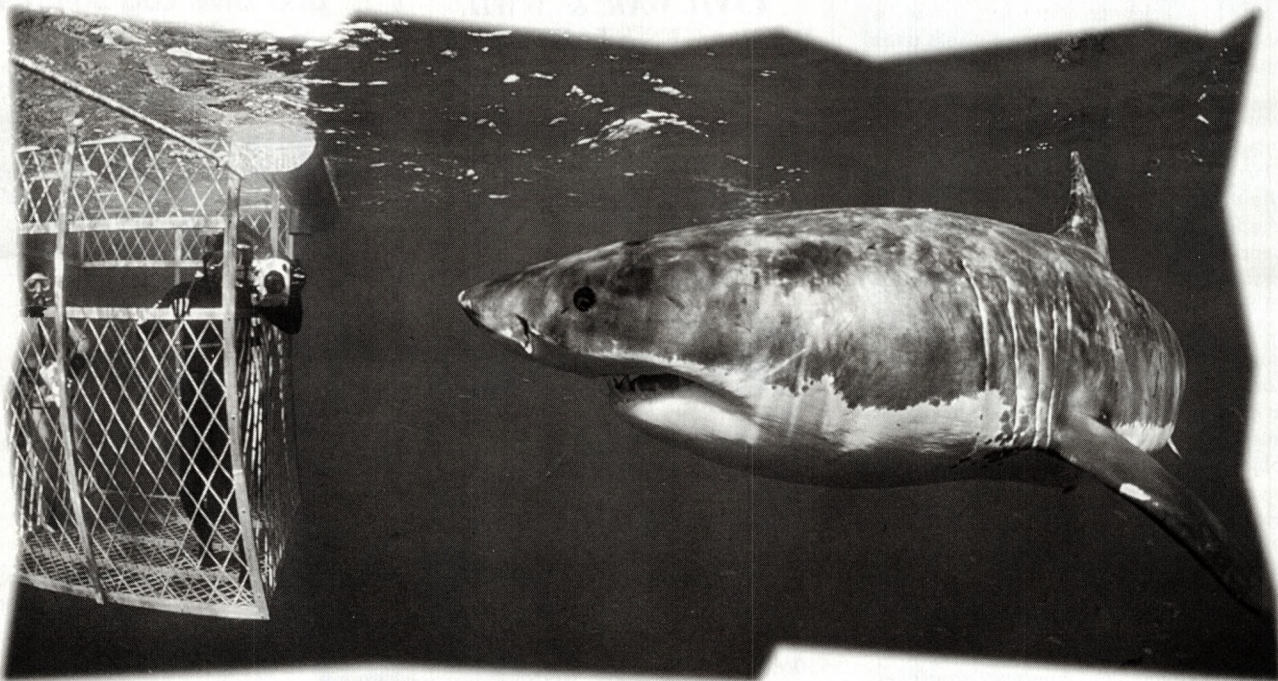


photo by Jeff Rotman

Then CRASH, his nose crumpled on the edge of the open door next to my outstretched camera.

We had been blessed with only two or three sharks all morning, so that afternoon most of the other divers were back on the boat warming up after hours in the shark cages immersed in 65 degree water.

As fate would have it, I was alone in the cage. Alone is the right word, too, because when you are in a cage surrounded by actively feeding white sharks, you experience an entirely new definition of loneliness.

Sometimes when I am alone in the cage, I take the opportunity to work through the side door rather than the viewing port. It gives me a better angle to shoot upward at the sharks for some dramatic effects.

To explain what happened next, I should tell you that I

sharks can't get in even if they try. It is the non-aggressive sharks that lull you a bit, encouraging you to shave your margin of safety to get that better picture.

This was one of those days. I was working a big, patient shark who was taking fifteen-pound chunks of meat but not charging the cage. I worked with him for a half-hour, then opened the side door of the cage to get a better angle. That particular cage had a big door that swung like the door of a barn. Hmmm. How could I hold it open to get unobstructed shots?

Aha! I would keep my left foot and left hand firmly inside the cage; then I would lean my entire body outside with my right foot holding the swinging door wide open. That way, my fully extended right arm could aim my camera like a pistol at the oncoming shark. At the time, it seemed like a great idea. Smart. Really smart. The

BY CARL ROESSLER

door was wide open like a catcher's mit, and I was the webbing.

So there I was, swinging out on that big door when the shark came gliding in. I had my Nikonos with a 15mm lens in my right hand extended out to the farthest corner of the swinging door. Those of you who know the 15mm lens know that it makes whales look like minnows if you don't work close to the animal. Accordingly, I said to myself, "Not yet. Not yet. Get him in closer, closer."

My heart was
going like a
trip-hammer.

photo by Marty Snyderman

The shark came toward me slowly, like some great pointy-nosed space ship. I held back as long as I could. He was getting close, coming directly in at the edge of the open door which was sticking perpendicularly out from the cage.

Finally, I pulled the trigger. One shot. Two shots. "This is great." Three shots. "Incredible." Then CRASH, his nose crumpled on the edge of the open door next to my outstretched camera. The mass of the shark pushed the whole cage back. I began to lose my footing but kept a firm grasp on the cage. Suddenly, I remembered where I was. I swung back inside the cage, pulling the door shut with my foot. My heart was going like a trip-hammer. My imagination went wild. The shark had hit the door head on. I realized with a shudder that if he had been six inches to the left he'd have gone right into the cage, or if it had hit at an angle, he would have crushed me or knocked me out of the cage entirely. Then what?

Sheepishly, I looked at the other cages. Thank goodness, they were empty. No one to witness my close call. My heart beat slowly subsided, and my burning cheeks cooled. Ever since, there have been nights when I find myself in that open doorway, totally exposed, with the shark boring in. A valuable lesson and the loss of a false sense of protection, a 20 pound camera between me and a 1,000 pound shark. ■

Carl Roessler is President of Sea & Sea Travel in San Francisco.

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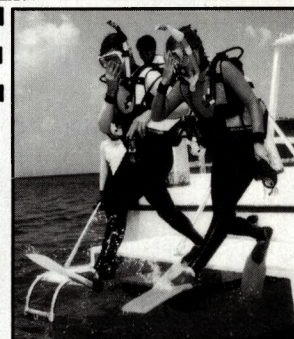
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Playful Pups

And a Lot of Bull

From an underwater photographer's perspective, the less water you shoot through, the better. It is a matter of image quality. Anyone who tries to pay their mortgage by marketing underwater photographs is keenly aware of this fact.

Of course, marine animals couldn't care less about our problems. They have enough of their own. The bottom line for me is that I have spent 20 years of my life trying to get a little closer to sharks, whales, manta rays, dolphins, and the rest of Neptune's Superstars. More often than not, I don't get as close as I want to, but sometimes I get too close.

The first time I dived a California sea lion rookery during the fall, I was rather surprised to discover that the nature of my problem was not one of getting close, but instead was about trying to back up far enough from a sea lion to take its picture. Only moments after I entered the water, I found myself in the middle of a swarming horde of intensely curious sea lion pups. I honestly don't know how many there were, but it was probably about three dozen, and my presence was the center

of their attention. Some were dive bombing me; others were nipping at my fins, snorkel, strobe and camera. One grabbed my hood in its mouth and tugged gently, just enough to dislodge my mask and fill it with water.

I never felt the slightest bit threatened. In fact, I found the situation humorous at first, but after a while, I got frustrated that I couldn't back up far enough to compose a decent frame. I always seemed to have at least one pup right in my face or playfully mouthing my camera gear.

It was late November, meaning that these California sea lion pups were about six months old. The colony of animals that uses Los Islotes Island in the southern end of Mexico's Sea of Cortez typically mates and pups in the spring. The bulls fight for and defend "territorial harems," meaning that the bulls vie for turf, not individual females. They couldn't care less if the females they mate with also

mate with other males all up and down the beach as long as no intruders invade their territory. Invading males are met with a full-on onslaught by a defiant bull.

By mid-fall, the bulls have mellowed out considerably. In fact, on several occasions, I have settled down on the sea floor only a few feet from a huge bull, and I couldn't get the animal to do much as blink at me, much less bark or threaten.

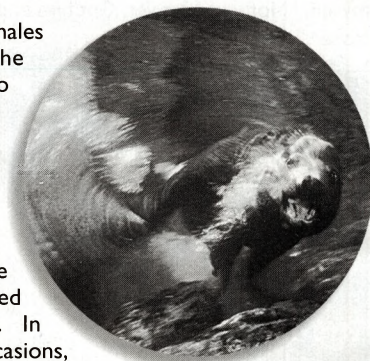
Given these experiences with California sea lions, I wasn't very concerned for my personal safety when I was asked to film a sequence for a *National Geographic* film about life at a rookery. We were shooting in early fall, and by then, I expected the pups to be fast-paced and the adults to be mellow. On the first day of the shoot, we observed a pair of bulls that were still barking and blowing bubbles at one another as they mock-defended their territories. We sat and observed for several hours, noting the differences between their mock defense and the all-out physical confrontations that occur during spring and early summer.

During the spring fights, the bulls frequently rush at and slam into each other. They hit hard and often seriously bite each other. These confrontations are not a game. The blood is real, and so is the threat of serious injury, even death.

We saw little actual fighting and a lot of barking and bluffing and chest puffing. The scenario seemed perfect. I would be able to film the mock-threat displays as the bulls barked and blew bubbles while defining and patrolling their boundaries. I was rather confident that I wouldn't get rushed just for being in the general area. Underwater, I filmed the displays of the two bulls from a distance at first, and then I began to creep in. Closer is always better, I reminded myself.

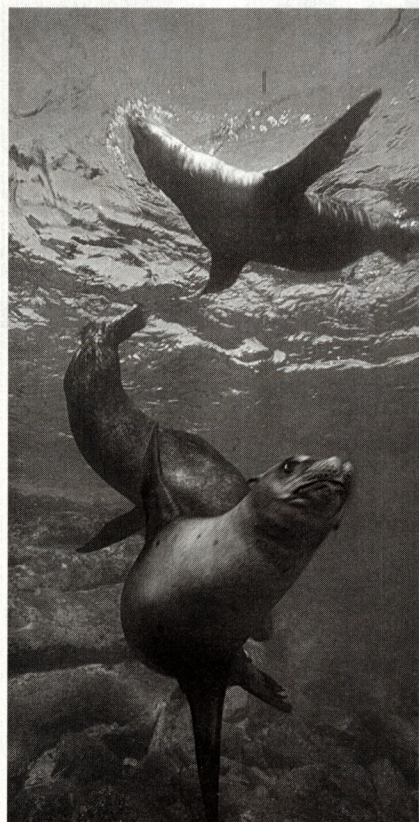
Suddenly, a third bull appeared. We had not seen the animal earlier, and I had no idea how its presence would impact the situation. I was trapped and couldn't really back away without being exposed in a manner I wasn't comfortable with. After a few minutes, I decided that the game wasn't much different with three players than it was with two. It was mostly barking and bluffing, without real fighting. After all, the calendar said November, the mellow time of year.

I resumed filming, working with one of the bulls as it



Top right:
Charging bull!
Mouth open and
going full speed
ahead in threat
display.

Bottom: California
sea lions at play.
photos by Marty
Snyderman



BY MARTY SNYDERMAN

cruised along its territorial boundary, when another animal, I am not sure which one, suddenly rushed the first bull. The first bull turned and swam right at me. In an instant it had slipped its head around my movie camera and grabbed my left arm with its mouth. I vividly remember three things. First, I was amazed at the fact that the animal's head was so thick it went from my shoulder to my waist. Second, I remember thinking, "Mother was right; this sport is stupid and so is her son." Third, I remember telling myself that whatever happens, I deserve it.

I can't count the number of times I have told other divers that no matter how mellow the situation appears to be with wild animals, never take the animals for granted. "Wild animals are just that, wild. They are not our friends. They don't want to be our pets." Clearly, I was guilty of thinking that my advice was good for my friends, but not for me. My cameraman's ego had somehow allowed me to get myself in a situation in which I thought I wouldn't get hurt.

With my arm still in the bull's huge mouth, he began shaking wildly. I could feel the sheer strength of this animal that was over five times my weight. I was in the ring with a giant, and in this case, he was in his element. I was just a clumsy land-based creature totally at his mercy or his anger. I was praying for the mercy.

As he shook, my body followed his lead, like rag doll in the hands of a wild child. It was clear that he could have snapped my arm in half. I know that some people in the nature film business claim that they would give their right arm to get certain shots. However, if someone had asked me that question at that moment, the choice was clear. Keep the arm, forget the shot. And, he could have the camera and housing with my blessing. After I'd been sufficiently shaken like a martini, the bull let go and casually swam away. It didn't harm me for only one reason as far as I am concerned. Pure luck.

If you get three wishes in life, I was down to two. Certainly my arm could have been broken. I could have been killed. There is simply no way I could have defended myself from an all-out attack by an 800-pound sea lion. Wobbly kneed, I swam away from my encounter with a bit more humility and wisdom. I promised myself never again to disregard arrogantly the fact that wild animals should not be taken for granted and to remember that being an underwater photographer doesn't impress a wild animal nearly as much as I allowed it to impress me. ■

Marty Snyderman is a Contributing Editor to Scuba Times Magazine.

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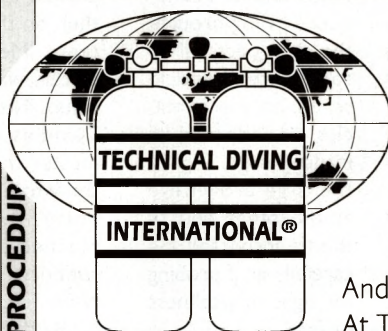


Correction

Crystal Software, maker of Lost Ships Roll Call, the shipwreck database for research and dive information has announced their latest version which includes a starter database of over 400 shipwrecks.

Their correct phone number is **(916) 889-1818**

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Attack of the Killer Barnacles

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Normally, I do not tremble in my booties at the thought of barnacles. The fact that their razor-sharp shells can cut through flesh as easily as the teeth of a shark causes me no more distress on an average day than the knowledge that the male barnacle has the largest penis (relative to body size) in the animal kingdom. These particular barnacles, however, were accelerating toward my face on the leading edge of a one-ton mass of bone and flesh 12 feet long, wider and thicker than a house beam, and propelled by one of the mightiest animals on earth. The clump of barnacles came to a sudden stop about a foot in front of my face. My gaze wandered down the massive pectoral fin to its eye,

which was studying me intently as if to gauge my reaction to this display of bravado. I tried to keep my cool as the left pectoral dropped slowly away and a round-house swing brought the right pectoral up to where I could scrutinize the barnacles that adorned its leading edge. Again, the large brown eye at the other end of the fin inspected me carefully as if probing for signs of weakness or fear.



The razor sharp barnacles of a humpback whale glimmer in the sun's rays. photo by Doug Perrine (photo taken under authority of National Marine Fisheries Service — permit #882 issued to Hawaii Whale Research Foundation)

I breathed a sigh of relief as the head finally rolled away in the other direction and the whale's body turned down and away from me until I saw what was coming up at me from below. The fluke of a humpback can be nearly as broad as the pectorals are long and is attached to the most powerful muscle on the planet. Two beats of a humpback's fluke can launch a 90,000 pound payload entirely out of the water. There are many things to think about when you see a monolithic fluke rushing upwards with its dark form outlined by the white barnacles along the rim; such as the time Nick Caloyianis was filming two male humpbacks competing for a female. One struck his camera housing so hard with its fluke that it sent him tumbling head over heels, dislodging his mask, and flooding the housing. When we examined the housing afterwards, we found that the aluminum shade around the dome port had actually been ground down

on one side from the impact of the barnacles on the fluke. Then there was Anthony D'Angelo, who was struck so hard by the fluke of a bottlenose dolphin that it broke two ribs and knocked him two feet out of the water. Emergency surgery saved his life, but they had to remove the remains of his spleen with a suction tube. A bottlenose, of course, looks like a flea next to a humpback. But I actually had little time to consider the consequences of being struck by the propulsive machinery of a 30-ton animal. In a split second, the whale's tail had passed dizzily close to my face, and the backwash had sent me careening backwards through the water. I saw the animal pause, angle its head back towards me, and once again the thoughtful eye seemed to be analyzing my response.

By that time, I was shaking so violently that I concluded I must be going hypothermic and it would be most prudent to get out of the water and warm up a bit. While I sat in the small inflatable boat, the young whale, which we estimated at about 30 feet, continued to swim around the boat, bobbing its head up first on one side, then on the other, as if to thoroughly examine the contents. Meanwhile, David, who had remained in the water, was shooting close-ups of the whale's eye on video. The whale reached out its long pectoral towards David as if it wanted to touch him but couldn't quite muster the nerve. When David swam back to the boat, the whale followed so closely that David couldn't resist doing what his better judgment told him not to; he reached out and rubbed the whale along the smooth rubbery skin on the side of its snout. The whale responded by moving even closer.

By the time David was back in the boat, I had recovered from my fright, re-loaded my camera and was ready for another encounter. The problem was how to get into the water. All I could see on all sides of the boat was whale. There was nowhere to get out of the boat without stepping on its body. Eventually it moved away a bit and I slipped in, but as soon as the bubbles cleared, I saw a dark snout capped with a white bonnet of barnacles bearing down on me. Perhaps it had enjoyed the contact with David and was hoping for another rub, but there was no bare skin visible at the tip of the snout — just a clump of barnacles that was beginning to look like broken glass on the end of a 30-foot pile driver. Suddenly, I realized that this time the whale wasn't stopping. I rolled back and pulled my knees into my chest, bringing my fins up in front of me just as the whale made contact. The next thing I knew, I was rushing backwards away from the boat with water pouring down my

BY DOUG PERRINE

snorkel and a boisterous juvenile whale connected to the soles of my fins.

Although I have seen male humpbacks attack each other ferociously and, after watching the video, I believe that the whale which struck Caloyianis did so purposefully, I don't believe that these animals generally hold any malice towards humans, which is quite remarkable considering how we've treated them. In fact, they often seem very careful to avoid striking someone who gets in their way and exhibit exquisite control of their enormous bodies in doing so. This whale, I believe, was mostly just curious. The encounter had begun when we noticed the whale following the boat. It came directly to the boat and began spyhopping. The flipper and fluke swings reminded me of a child pulling punches in front of a friend's face to see if the friend will flinch. I don't believe it intended to hurt me. On the other hand, this young, inexperienced animal, still growing, might not have had as fine a control over its body as an adult. It might have been lacking a little in judgment or caution. It might also have had no conception how incredibly delicate its new found plaything was. Would it play with its new toy until the toy broke?

All of these thoughts raced through my head as we plowed through the ocean with the little rubber boat starting to look very small and far away. When the charge let up for a moment, I tried to make an end run around to the boat. But the whale circled and cut me off. I fainted left, I fainted right, but any way I tried to swim, the whale was there blocking me. I was alone in the bottomless blue ocean with a 60,000 pound wild animal which wanted me for its plaything, and the only parts it had to play with were adorned with barnacles that could out-chop a Cuisinart!

Eventually, the whale dove, and I swam back toward the boat, filled with terror that it might surface again before I made it back. I had just climbed aboard when the whale surfaced next to us, looking miffed that its toy had escaped. It circled the boat for 5 or 10 minutes until it noticed another boat a quarter mile or so away and took off in that direction. A minute or two later, we heard squeals of delight coming from the other boat. Sometimes happiness is having a whale swim up to your boat. Sometimes happiness is having a whale swim away from your boat. ■

Doug Perrine is a Contributing Editor to Scuba Times Magazine.

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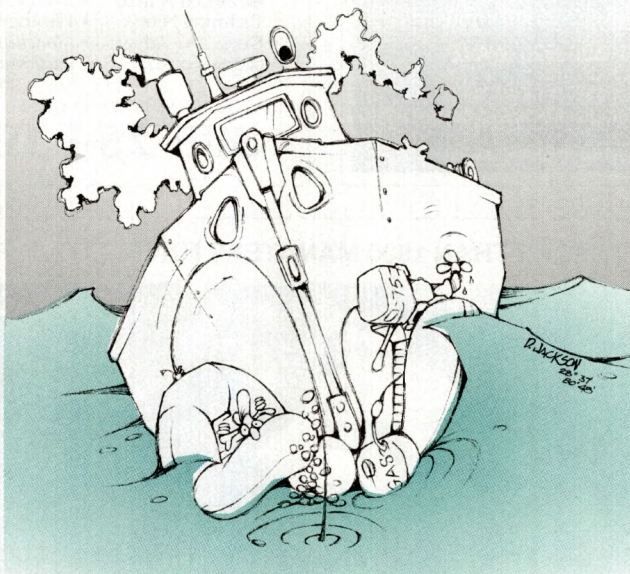


Please Don't Light A Match

Asleep on Watch

In August 1991, I was invited to participate in an expedition led by Rod Farb and Gary Gentile to visit the famous Civil War Ironclad the *Monitor*. Our goal was to make measurements via videotaping and photography as part of a research project.

The *U.S.S. Monitor* rests in 230 feet of water off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, in a National Marine Sanctuary policed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This combination of depth and protected status led to the development of an unusual diving protocol.



With the inflatable in place, the main dive boat, *Sea Fox*, backed up to the inflatable and dropped off divers who followed the inflatable's anchor line to the wreck. After videotaping, the divers ascended the anchor line and decompressed, with the last 20 feet of decompression made on 100 percent oxygen supplied from a huge K cylinder that was bolted to a rack in the inflatable. One or two safety divers tended the boat and watched over the decompressing divers. *Sea Fox* cruised in lazy circles around the inflatable while we dived. Like many plans, this one was reasonable, workable and simple. It had worked the previous year flawlessly. In retrospect, this should have made me wary because in plans like this lurk Murphy and his inflexible law.

The first day out to the *Monitor* went off practically without a hitch. The responsibility of tending the other divers fell on me. I just lay there in the water listening to

Sea Fox cruise by, chum-chum-chum-chum, in endless circles to starboard. Why to starboard? Because the inflatable lay so low that Captain Doogie couldn't see it if he passed it off *Sea Fox*'s port side.

Overnight, the Atlantic turned ugly. The sea was rough and dark with a strong current. Again I took the safety-diver position. Through it all *Sea Fox* cruised in its endless clockwise orbits around the inflatable, and I quickly learned where *Sea Fox* was by her sound.

The next two days, we were blown completely off the site. On our fourth day, we resumed diving. The sea was beginning to lie down, though a strong current stayed with us. On the fifth day, Larry, the other safety diver, went down with the first divers, and I took immediate duty on the surface. *Sea Fox* began circling, chum-chum-chum-chum. About an hour and a half later, the first divers came up. Larry and I crawled into the inflatable to rest while we waited for the next team to go.

As we rested, the little boat bounced gently, tugging against its anchor, lulling us into a relaxed "between things to do" state. For the moment, I turned off my Murphy alert. Mistake. Chum-chum-chum, I could hear *Sea Fox* approaching from behind me. Ahh, relaxed. No problem. Chum-Chum-Chum. A little voice began to nag me: "From behind me? I've got my back to starboard. *Sea Fox* shouldn't be behind me unless she's changed direction!"

CHUM-CHUM-CHUM-CHUM! Turning, I faced *Sea Fox*'s port bow not 10 feet away, headed right for our bow. Captain Doogie hadn't seen us, and now *Sea Fox* rolled over the inflatable's nose with us in it, her massive screw threatening to turn us into chum-chum-chum for the fish if we fell overboard and got under her.

"Look out!" Larry yelled.

"Doogie!" people aboard *Sea Fox* yelled, "Back off!"

Larry and I crawled aft as *Sea Fox* forced down the inflatable's nose, filling it with water and inclining us like a sub on a crash dive. The nose dipped deeper, and the stern rose because the anchor line held us in place. Dive gear and rope tumbled into the water, and I started to grab some of it.

"Forget that," Larry admonished me, "Don't get under the hull; you'll be crushed." Or worse, CHUM.

"Put your feet against the hull and push off!" someone hollered. A good idea. Larry and I braced *Sea Fox* with our feet and our backs against the soft inflatable sides, heaving for all we were worth.

Suddenly we popped clear as the inflatable's tie points stripped away from the rubber, freeing us from the anchor line. The inflatable was flooded to the top, every-

BY KARL SHREEVES

thing was a mess, and the anchor line tumbled about in chaos as we rushed down current.

Before we could react, we stopped abruptly. Somewhere within the flooded boat, amid all the gear aboard, the anchor line had tangled and snagged on something, but what? A sudden stream of bubbles in our midst confirmed my fears; the line had snagged on the oxygen bottle's valve, and now the entire boat was being held against the current by that valve.

There was pandemonium aboard *Sea Fox*, but Larry and I were too busy to pay attention. Aside from the fact that we were in a swamped, snagged inflatable in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, our noses detected one small additional problem that didn't go well with a bubbling gush of highly flammable pure oxygen; the outboard's fuel line had torn, and we were sitting in a gasoline slick.

"Start the outboard, and run the water out of it," yelled someone from *Sea Fox*.

Larry and I looked at each other. He didn't say anything, but his expression said, "I don't think so."

"No way. Throw us a bucket," I yelled back. "And I need a wrench."

"What for?" came back.

"The oxygen tank's leaking, and gasoline is leaking all over the place."

The crowd on *Sea Fox* stopped talking all at once, just for a moment. Then, "Wrench and bucket on the way."

With skill and care, Doogie maneuvered *Sea Fox* to deliver the bucket, wrench and a bottle of dish soap to emulsify the gasoline.

"Let's not do anything that might cause a spark," I cautioned, thankful that the metal-to-metal contact between wrench and valve would be underwater.

"No argument here," returned Larry.

A moment later, the crisis had passed. Larry secured the gas line with two pulls of the wrench, and the oxygen stopped flowing. We sloshed enough soap around the boat to emulsify the gasoline, then bailed it out. Remarkably, we'd lost nothing, not even a fin, though my wetsuit smelled like a gas station for the next five dives or so.

That evening as *Sea Fox* headed to port, the incident came up in conversation.

"I'm just glad *Sea Fox* didn't hit you dead on," said one person.

"I'm glad that fitting tore out."

"I'm glad no one got hurt."

"I'm glad," I said, "that we don't smoke." ■

Karl Shreeves is PADI's Manager of Technical Development.

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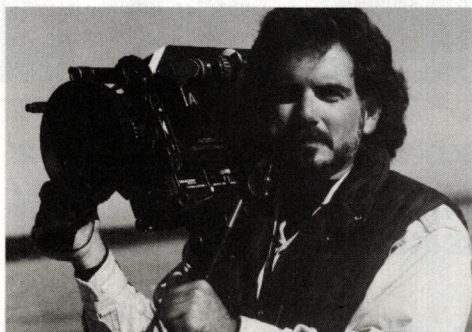
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Bob Talbot: Life's Lessons

A graying experience

I let go to swim away and realized I was stuck. Uh, stuck to the side of this whale.



Wanting to get a message across to people about the importance of the oceans, Bob Talbot felt photography was the means. He found an additional avenue to relay this message as he expanded into cinematography with his work on the *Free Willy* films, the 1996 *Flipper* movie and his own *Dolphins and Orcas* video. Through his career and his quest, Bob Talbot never thought he would be trying to get an additional message out, a message learned from thousands of career dives and a mistake: a message of life or death.

STM: Have you had any close calls that were life threatening?

Bob: Oh, this is most embarrassing. I think the really close ones that were pretty glaring were about half a dozen, and these were mostly because I did stupid things.

STM: Were you ever injured from any of them?

Bob: Not severely, I was never hospitalized. They were "all or nothing" type of deals.

STM: Unfortunately, that's the way it goes with diving, isn't it?

Bob: Yeah, exactly.

STM: Tell me about your closest call or as you put it, "Your near-death experience."

Bob: Early 1985, right after the first of the year, a buddy of mine, Jeff Corman, and I were out in a 25-foot skip jack off Dana Point

in California. We were actually just looking for whales and dolphins and whatever. We heard a call over the radio from the Coast Guard that a fishing vessel came across a gray whale entangled in a drift net. So after we monitored the call for awhile, we contacted the Coast Guard and said we have had some experience with whales and maybe we can be of some assistance. We hooked up with the fishing boat about 11 miles off shore and located the whale. I slipped into the water and saw that the whale was completely entangled from head to tail in this drift net. The net had wrapped the whale three times, and there was about another 30 feet of net trailing behind the animal with several

Norwegian fishing floats still attached.

STM: How large was the whale?

Bob: Probably 30 to 35 feet.

STM: What happened next?

Bob: Aboard the fishing boat, I rigged up a knife on a pole and got back in. At this point, the whale proceeded with a defensive move by performing a body chop with its tail. I decided this is not going to work out, especially being by myself with an agitated gray whale. So I went back to the skip jack and called the Coast Guard cutter and informed them that we needed some help.

STM: Did anyone come to help?

Bob: We were able to get hold of a research vessel out of Newport called the *WestWind* operated by a guy named Chuck Mitchell. These guys responded some hours later and were able to put four divers in the water with no weight belts, just free diving.

STM: Did you get back in?

Bob: Yes, except I donned a small pony bottle, grabbed my Nikonos and decided to take shots of these guys working on the animal. After finishing a roll, I brought the camera back up to a lifeguard boat, which was on the station at this point, handed the camera up to one of the lifeguards and went back down to help with the whale.

STM: Was the whale calming down?

Bob: For now, it was okay. The whale would dive, but it could only go down to 15 or 20 feet with the floats on it. The four guys had good sense to let go of the net when the whale went down, and when the whale came back up, they would keep working on it. I thought since I had a tank on, I might as well hang on to the whale while it dove and keep sawing away on the polypropylene line with the little dive knife I had. What I did not take into account was the significant loom of net hanging below the whale. When the whale went down, the net washed up, and each time it dove, the net was washing up over my back and tank, hanging up and getting tangled.

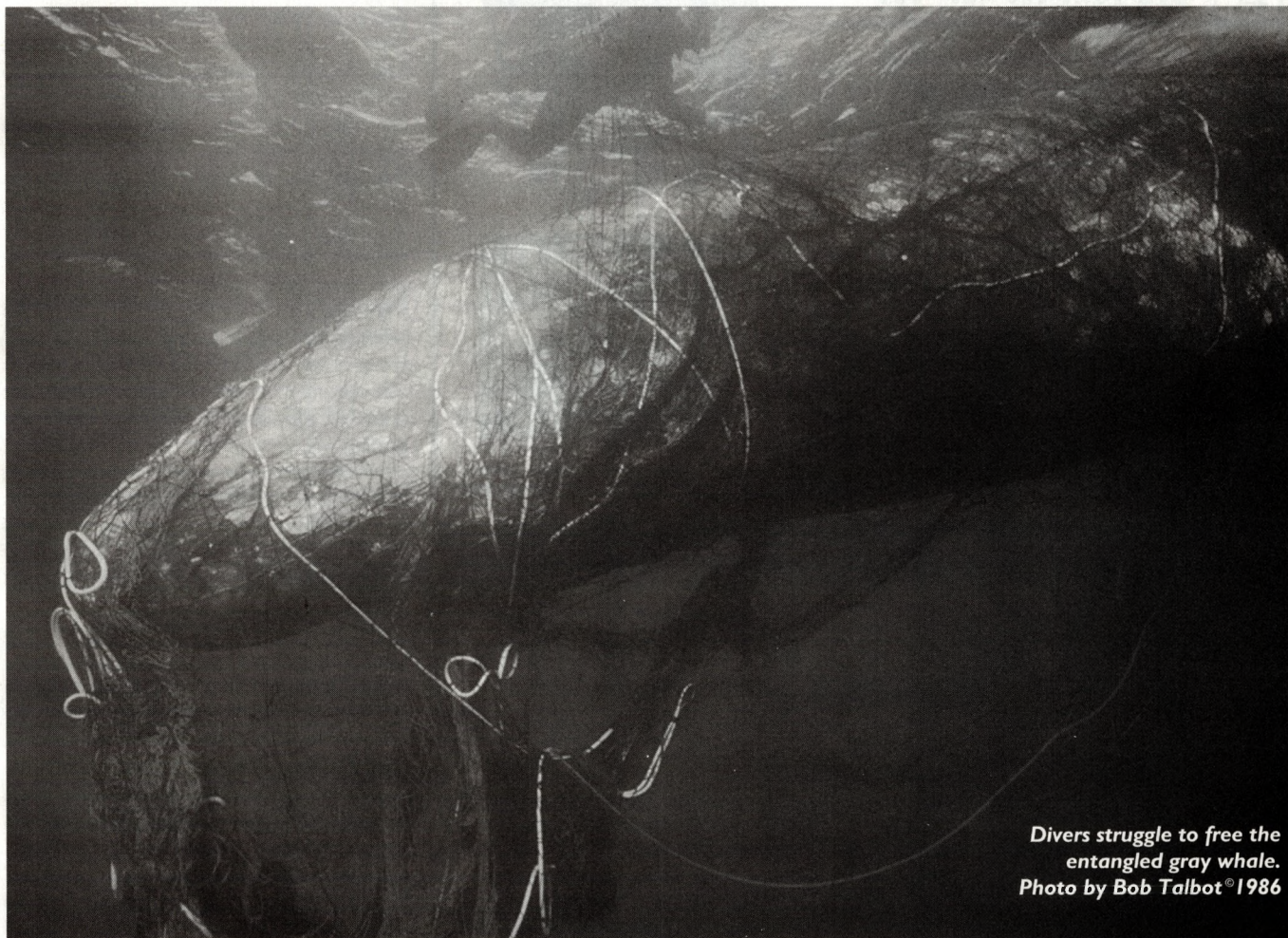
STM: You didn't realize this was happening?

Bob: Well, no. But before too long, the whale became agitated again and was getting very annoyed, obviously by my holding on and being so close to his head. The whale started shaking its head and bobbing its body and head, trying to get rid of me. So I said fine, and I let go to swim away and realized I was stuck. Uh, stuck to the side of this whale.

STM: What did you do?

Bob: It hurts me to remember the exact sequence of events because it was pretty tense there for a while. When I first realized I was tangled, I rather sheepishly

BY CHRISTOPHER GRANT



*Divers struggle to free the entangled gray whale.
Photo by Bob Talbot © 1986*

said across the whale to the other guys, "Hey guys, I could use a little help here." I didn't want to make a really big deal out of it because I was really embarrassed and I didn't even know these guys.

STM: Then what?

Bob: I tried pushing the net away from me, but the longer I stayed, the more agitated the whale became. Pretty soon the whale was just thrashing his head back and forth, pushing me four to five feet out of the water, slamming me down trying to get this creature off its side. Well, the more agitated the whale got, the more he thrashed, the worse I got tangled and before too long, the net came down over my head and my face. The whale dove again and shook me up pretty bad this time. When we came up, more of the net went over my head, and that time was the only time in my life I ever yelled out "HELP!" in no uncertain terms.

STM: Did they understand it was serious?

Bob: Yeah, the guys now knew what was going on, but they couldn't get near me because the whale was thrashing so wildly; it was just white water. The whale was going berserk. The lifeguards later told me that when they saw me come up with that net over my head, they were sure I was finished and it was too risky for them to

even try to get near me. So they stayed on the boat the whole time.

STM: So they just wrote you off?

Bob: Yeah, basically. And I can understand why; this was a tough situation. The whale kept thrashing for some time. Chuck told me later that he watched me reach down to get my belt off and drop it clear of the net. Apparently, I didn't get it clear of the net, but I did get it clear of me. Then my mask came off in the net, and I realized I was breathing like a locomotive on the verge of panic. I can remember thinking at one point that there can't be that much air left in this 35-cubic-foot pony bottle and I had been down for a while breathing like crazy. The net was all wrapped up in the second stage, so it was pulling the mouthpiece; my jaw was sore for several days just from trying to hold on to the mouthpiece. I was worried about the mouthpiece pulling off as well.

STM: Did you panic?

Bob: I was getting pretty excited, but I never panicked, thank God, but I was getting close, the closest I have. It

... the whale was just thrashing his head back and forth, pushing me four to five feet out of the water, slamming me down trying to get this creature off its side.

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was at that point, I realized I wasn't going to make it out. And as soon as I realized that and accepted that I had really screwed up this time and that there wasn't going to be a way out of this one. . . I immediately calmed down, accepted the situation, and for a moment was just waiting for it to happen. Just let the events unfold and whatever. . . It was then that I kind of gathered my thoughts and decided I might as well try getting out of the tank.

STM: So you basically became relaxed while your body was entombed in a net?

Bob: Yeah. It was kind of weird, but it allowed me to think. I was then able to get most of the net off my face, head and around my torso, but most of the pulling I could feel was on my tank. I reached back, and of course, that was hopeless; it was completely balled up around the valve and the yoke. I thought if I could get the tank off at this point, it would be my only real chance.

STM: Was anyone still trying to help you?

Bob: Chuck Mitchell kept trying to get in and help me, but the whale would pull me away. So I released the straps from my tank, and I finally got out of the tank, and I surfaced next to the lifeguard boat. The whale surfaced, then the whale dove, and I felt this tug on my legs. I thought again, "Oh God," and I yelled out to the lifeguards, "My fins!" They yelled back, "@&%# your fins!" like I was worried about losing the fins. Then I replied, "They're still tangled!" I took a big breath, and down I went with the whale. At this point, I thought, "This is really bad." Now, I was pretty much convinced this is really it.

STM: You must have felt the situation was inevitable.

Bob: Exactly. I had thought okay, you know what; this is going to work out, but now here I am being jerked back down, holding my breath at this point. So I reached down, and I got one of my fins off that was tangled. I reached for the other tangled fin, but I couldn't remove it. The polypropylene line had wrapped around my calf and was pulling down tighter as the whale dove deeper. I could not get it off. Chuck Mitchell free dove down with his knife and was able to cut the remaining line and net, and I came back to the surface. And that was that.

STM: What happened to the four guys?

Bob: The others were unable to get near me. Chuck was the closest one to me, and he was the one who really saved my life.

STM: That's frightening.

Bob: Yeah, exactly. But we don't need anymore Captain Ahab's or Bob Talbots. With more and more nets out there, divers are going to come across animals trapped in them and want to help. I want to encourage them to really think about what they are doing before they do anything. It's funny because when I first saw this whale in this net, I couldn't understand how it could get that tangled. I couldn't fathom how the whale could get to the point where it was cocooned. I learned a quick lesson on how easy and fast it can happen. No matter how careful you think you're being, it's very easy to get tangled in a net. It's pretty spooky. I think where divers can make a difference is by becoming active and trying to bring about legislation to limit drift nets and gill nets. We have made great strides, but we have a long way to go. The best way to keep people and animals out of nets is to keep the nets out of the ocean. 

unaffected by hurricanes

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shoot the event based on the fact that I, me, Fred Garth, had told them that we had the necessary permission? I quickly determined that I couldn't explain it to her and I set out on a mission to find Senor Cabral, who had sent me the permission letter in the first place. If Cabral was a fox, I was 10 million hounds. If he was a worm, I was a thousand woodpeckers. If he was out there, by golly, I was going to find him and find him quickly.

My assistant entered my office with a pink phone message. It was Gilliam, who by now had been dubbed "the Panicky Guy" because of his frequent frantic phone calls. He was on the line in yet another panic.

"Man, I'm stuck in New Jersey in this damn blizzard," he raved.

"New Jersey? My condolences. Do you think it's time to pop your handy suicide capsule and end it all?"

"I'm serious, man," he said a full two octaves higher than before. "The whole East Coast is a freakin' glacier. I might be here for days. I may never get out. I'm in a \$40 Holiday Inn and they've jacked up the price to \$200 bucks. It's insane."

"The Holiday Inn? I know that's tough on your system. You *sure* you don't want to go for that suicide pill?"

"Screw you, I need some help here."

"Okay, calm down, how did the training go?"

"Outstanding! Boyd is set to go."

Bret had traveled to Jersey to train Boyd Matson, host of *National Geographic Explorer*, on the Draeger/UWATEC rebreather. The plan was to train Boyd in advance so that if we ever actually made it to the Silver Bank, Boyd would don the rebreather, dive with the humpbacks and they'd have one helluva show for their 100 million or so viewers. All went well until the heavens decided to rip open and paint the landscape white.

"Boyd's fully trained. That's all taken care of. But now we're having trouble with the absorbent. We've got to get 2,000 pounds of absorbent to Grand Turk and it's too late to ship it by boat. We've got to send it air freight."

Of course, the rebreathers were still in Germany. But, if they actually made it in time for our expedition, we needed a crate load of absorbent, the stuff that filters out exhaled carbon dioxide so the gas can be rebreathed without causing the diver to black out.

"What else?" I asked, fully expecting more.

"Well, they still haven't recovered the membrane system. So, now, along with

the absorbent, we have to air freight 12, 300-cubic-foot cylinders of oxygen so we can partial pressure blend the nitrox."

That was a major setback. I was still confident that the rebreathers would arrive. And, I knew that with *National Geo's* pull we would probably get the permits. But, flying in huge quantities of oxygen to the Turks and Caicos along with 2,000 pounds of a white granular substance would be difficult if at all possible and if so, it would be damned expensive.

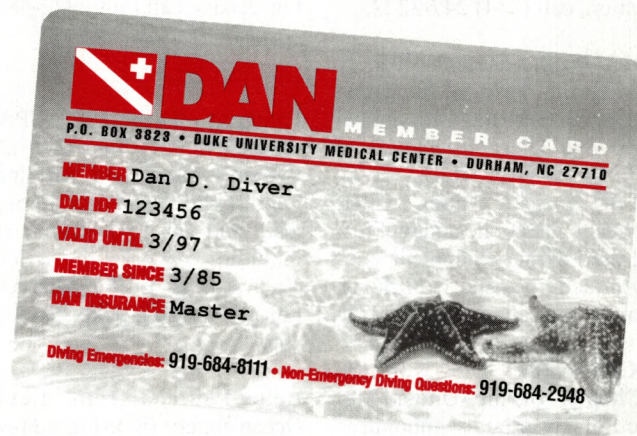
This dilemma befell us at the hands of some unknown thieves who probably had no idea what they were stealing. Late one night these bandits ripped off over \$50,000 worth of nitrox-making equipment. One can only guess what they thought when they popped the lock and found machines that had just recently been invented. It's like someone stealing Bell's first telephone or Marconi's first radio. Yeah, it's a cool box with a lot of wires but what the hell does it do?

The beauty of the membrane system is that it actually strains nitrogen out of normal breathing air, thus producing oxygen-enriched air or as we know it, nitrox. High-pressure, oxygen which is both expensive and explosive, neither of which is appealing, is unnecessary. Yet, unless the cops could turn up the gear quickly, we would be forced to ship in oxygen.

Later that day, I finally got some good news. The rebreathers had arrived. Things were looking up. Two days later, Gilliam escaped from New Jersey and the oxygen and absorbent were scheduled for delivery. Within a week, after a downright blitzkrieg of faxes from both *Scuba Times Magazine* and *National Geographic Television*, we finally received the filming permits from the DR. So, with two days to spare, we turned to Turks Air's air-freight department. And, in one stroke of the pen we shipped over two tons (4,463 pounds to be exact) of gear to Grand Turk. There were 18 rebreathers, 12 cylinders of oxygen, a ton of absorbent and enough spare parts to build an undersea habitat, if necessary. All this, and still one question remained. Would we actually see any whales? That was one miracle we couldn't control. ■

Fred D. Garth is the Publisher of Scuba Times. Part II of his article will appear in the next issue and will answer burning questions like: Did Ranger Tom place anyone in irons? or Did National Geographic's Boyd Matson get eaten by an angry male whale?

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DIVER'S DATEBOOK

MAY

Dallas, Texas. Dive Dallas — Scuba & Travel Show will be held May 4-5 at the Dallas Market Hall. Some highlights include an underwater photo contest and a diving and beachwear fashion show. For more information, call (214) 247-3222.

Dayton, Ohio. Wright State University Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation will host the 14th annual SCUBA Expo and Diver Exchange on Sunday, May 5, 1996, at McLin Gym, located in WSU Ervin J. Nutter Center. This event is free to the public and will feature new and used diving equipment sales and a variety of activities and workshops. For more information, call (513) 873-3223.

Oakland, California. The Northern California Chapter of the Underwater Photographic Society proudly announces Sea '96, the 32nd Annual International Underwater Film Festival. It will be held on Saturday, May 18, at the Paramount Theater of the Arts. For ticket information, call (415) 391-9207.

Bahamas Banks. Join marine photographers Brandon D. Cole and Stuart Westmorland, frequent contributors to *Scuba Times Magazine*, for two trips onboard the *Dream Too* to swim with and photograph wild spotted dolphins. Trip dates are May 19-25 and May 26-June 1. For details, call (509) 922-4855.

JUNE

Houston, Texas. SEASPACE '96 is scheduled for June 7-9 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and will include a 150 booth exhibit hall, seminars, photo contest, and an underwater film festival including work by *Scuba Times* Contributing Editor Marty Snyderman. For information, tickets and photo contest entry form, call (713) 467-6675.

Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana. Sub Ocean Safety (SOS), a non-profit organization, is hosting the world's first underwater marathon on June 12, under Lake Pontchartrain, bordering New Orleans. The first race will be a timed 5K, and the second will be for those wishing to com-

plete the 24-mile breadth of the lake. There is no registration fee, but participants are encouraged to receive "per-mile" donations which will go directly towards SOS emergency medical relief and educational projects. For more details and a registration form, contact SOS at (800) 867-3807.

AUGUST

Cocos Island, Costa Rica: The second *Scuba Times* Rebreather Expedition has been scheduled in the land of hammerheads, giant Pacific mantas, whale sharks and white-tipped reef sharks, during August 11-21. The expedition will run on the spacious, 115-foot *Sea Hunter*. Divers will receive full certification on the Draeger/Uwatec Atlantis I semi-closed rebreather as well as nitrox certification. Only 16 spaces are available to passengers so space is extremely limited. The cost of the 10-day expedition is \$3,495 per person, which includes both nitrox and rebreather certification. Call 800-234-0060 (or see page 94) for further information.

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Reef & Rainforest announces the return of the **S.S. Thorfinn** to Truk, Micronesia, in the Western Pacific. The **S.S. Thorfinn** has just undergone a massive refitting and redecoration and now offers seven-night dive packages with unlimited diving in Truk Lagoon. For more information, contact Reef & Rainforest at (800) 794-9RNR.

If you could go diving anywhere in the world, where would it be? **Peter Hughes** wants to know your first choice of destinations, but it has to be someplace without a *Dancer*. If your first choice is the same as Peter's, then your name will be entered in a drawing to win a trip for two aboard the inaugural charter of Peter Hughes' fifth *Dancer*. **Entry deadline is June 1, 1996**, and should be submitted in writing to Peter Hughes Diving, 6851 Yumuri Street, Suite 10, Coral Gables, Florida 33146.

Are you single and looking for someone special? Well **Peter Hughes Diving** may be able to help. They are booking a singles charter for 10 women and 10 men aboard the *M/V Wind Dancer* in the Bay Islands of Honduras. If you are interested, please call (800)-9DANCER.

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See & Sea Travel announces new adventurous cruises in July and August aboard the 85-foot **Golden Dawn**. The new cruises to Hermit and Ninigo Islands in western New Guinea will explore huge schools of porpoises, mantas, active sharks and rich reef life. In addition, for avid divers, the 120-foot **Nai'a** offers a new itinerary from Lautoka northward between Fiji's main islands to Gau Island in the east. For more information, call (800) DIV-XPRT. ■

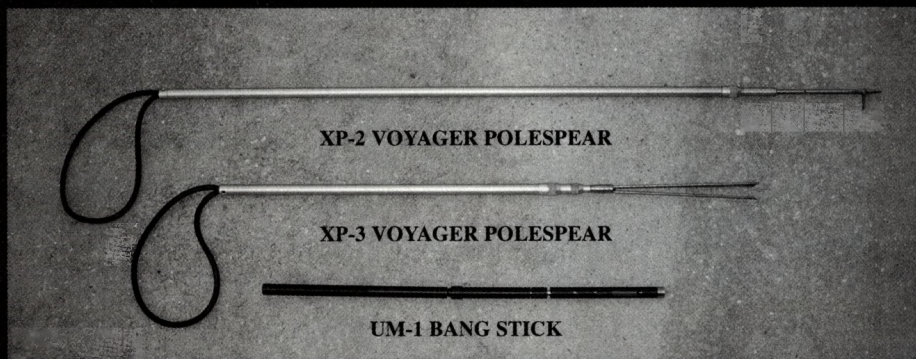
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Special Rebreather Expeditions Continue

During this past winter, *Scuba Times* broke new ground in diving by launching the first-ever rebreather diving expedition which was open to the public. The three-week expedition, which ventured to the Silver Bank in the southern Atlantic to dive with 2,000 migrating humpback whales (see article, page 14), involved three liveboards, 18-rebreathers, one ton of Sofnolime absorbent (to eliminate excess carbon dioxide) and over 3,600 cubic feet of pressurized pure oxygen. During the three-week period, over 50 divers were certified on the Draeger/Uwatec Atlantis I semi-closed rebreather, which proved to be as stealthy and hydrodynamic as expected.

In August 1996, readers have the opportunity to participate in the second rebreather expedition, this time to Cocos Island, Costa Rica, famous for schooling hammerhead sharks, giant mantas, whale sharks and scads of white-tip sharks lurking along the rocky bottom. Traditionally, schooling hammerheads have been extremely frightened by bubbles from open-circuit scuba. Because of the reduced bubble flow as well as the silent operation of the rebreathers, chances of up-close encounters with the sharks are greatly enhanced. For photographers, this could mean the difference between a photo with only a shadowy silhouette in the distance (sound familiar?) and a close-up image of a shark's head. With the rebreather advantage, beginning photographers have the opportunity to get coveted images that were formerly only attainable by professionals who spent weeks waiting for perfect conditions.

The Cocos Rebreather Expedition is a 10-day trip from August 11-21. The expedition will utilize the 115-foot-long *Sea Hunter*. Only 16 spaces are available to readers on the trip, so space is extremely limited.

Expedition leaders include Publisher/Editor of *Scuba Times*, Fred Garth; *Advanced Diving Journal* Editor, Bret Gilliam and Uwatec USA General Manager, Sean Griffin. Participants will



photo by Bret Gilliam

not only have the opportunity to dive with schooling hammerheads, white tips, giant Pacific mantas and whale sharks, but they will also receive full rebreather certification and nitrox certification, which is all included in the price. Classes in gas blending and use of oxygen will also be part of this expedition. Per person cost for the 10-day expedition is \$3,495.

Palau Bound

Following the Cocos expedition, *Scuba Times* will travel to Palau for

two, back-to-back weeks in December. The magic of Palau's walls lies in the 20-foot to 130-foot range offering incredible coralline walls with sheer and inverted drop offs. Palau's waters are teaming with big animal life in the shark variety. Gray reefs, white-tip reefs and the occasional hammerhead are most common on world-renowned dives, such as Blue Corner and Big Drop (see article, page 16). Field of multi-colored corals are bathed in warm currents promoting Palau's undersea world one of the most verdant in the world.



photo by Doug Perrine

Garth and Gilliam will again lead the expedition which begins on the spacious 110-foot catamaran *Palau Aggressor* and ends aboard the luxurious 120-foot *Sun Dancer*. The first week runs from December 1-8 and the second from December 8-15.

While rebreathers are not expected to be available on this expedition, *Scuba Times* will be incorporating an extra special element into this expedition. During the trips, a series of articles for publication in *Scuba Times* will be developed which will be written by passengers and illustrated with photos from passengers. Photography will be reviewed and critiqued daily and photographers will be counseled on how to gear their photos towards publishable images. Educational, yet entertaining classes in book, magazine and newspaper writing as well as above and underwater photography will be conducted by expedition leaders Garth and Gilliam, who have had hundreds of articles and photographs published.

Photography from the passengers will be developed on board each night during the trip, with the best of the best being chosen for publication. Expedition goers will be shown what editors look for in photography for publication as well as the best way to get an editor's attention (not including the obvious cash bribes). Writing will be reviewed and critiqued during the week.

Only 12 spaces are available on each of these expeditions. Cost for each one-week trip is \$2,695 per person. ■

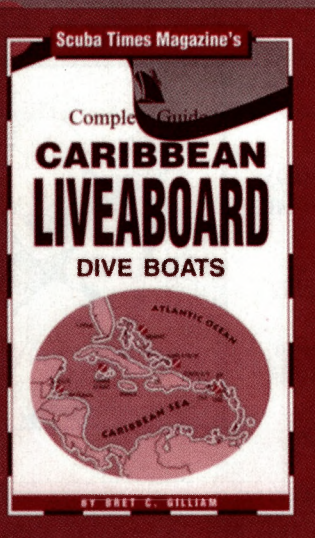
For more information on any of these special expeditions call *Scuba Times* at 800-234-0060.

photo by Norbert Wu

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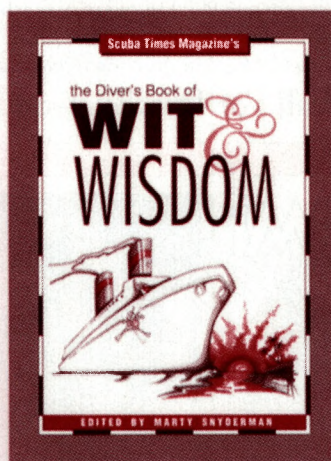
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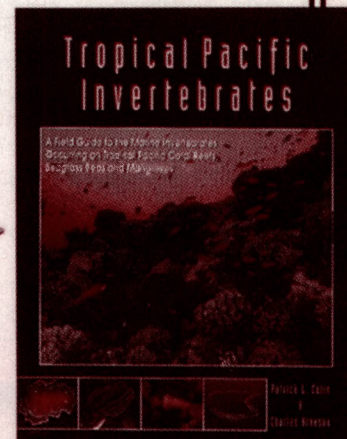
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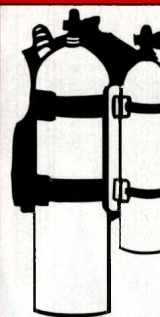


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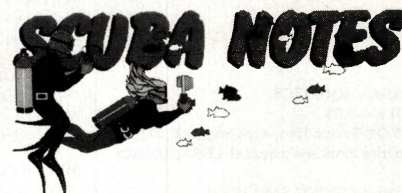
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SPRING HAS SPRUNG...

AND SO'S MY WETSUIT

Baseball great Ted Williams has always insisted that the most difficult feat in all of sports is hitting a pitched baseball. He is wrong. Obviously he's never put on a cold, damp wetsuit. No matter how diligent your instructor, how thorough your pool work, did anything really prepare you for the first time you rubber-wrestled your way into this medieval instrument of torture?

Our pal Norman is one of the better underwater photographers working in cold water (his warm water work is sometimes blurred, probably because he's so used to shivering while shooting). One chilly November Sunday he was invited to dive off *Jack's Boat* (it belongs to Jack, who can name it anything he wants). Norm had done a couple of dives the day before and had left his wetsuit on the back porch; it was frozen stiff.

A young diver who had recently moved to New England was on the boat when Norm got there and watched him carry on the wet suit under his arm like a deformed surf board. A little apprehensive about cold water to begin with, the young man watched nervously as Norman softened the wetsuit in the boat's 50 degree wake. The young man has not been seen since.

Cold is not the only problem. On a hot July day several years ago, we took our friend Janet out on the boat while we were diving the Rockport breakwater. She thought she'd try snorkeling, so we brought along Sue's old wetsuit. The suit didn't quite fit. Janet struggled to get into it while we geared up and did a dive. An hour or so later, we surfaced to find she'd *almost* gotten the bottom on and was sweating like a sumo wrestler in a sauna.

We tossed her over the side briefly to cool her off and upped anchor and headed for a second dive site. By the time we'd geared up, she had the bottom on, and by the time we surfaced from the second dive, she was finally in the whole

suit. Her face was boiled-lobster red, and her fingers were bloody from pulling rubber. The suit was so tight we were afraid she'd burst it like a sausage on a griddle.

The only thing keeping her from having a good time was that. . . now she had to. . . you guessed it. She flopped into the water, paddled around awhile (with a silly grin that said she didn't have to, you know, anymore). To this day, you can see on Janet's arms and legs where the wetsuit seams were.

Clearly the majority of wetsuit designers are male and probably perverts of some sort. Few of the new high-tech, semi drysuits are made in woman's models. The only women who are comfortable in them have a single large breast in the center of their chests, rather than the more traditional arrangement. Within this context, the trend towards brightly colored, stylish wetsuits seems roughly akin to tying a pretty pink ribbon on the dentist's drill.

Many locals take great pride in the bedraggled condition of their suits, each tear and hole a badge of honor won in single combat with urchins and barnacles. Some are so shamed with a new wetsuit, that the first time they don it, they roll around in the rocks to give it that patina of experience.

Cold-water divers often debate the etiquette and relative merits of relieving themselves in their wetsuits. This is a serious topic with substantial bodies of evidence supporting both positions. Drysuit divers generally do not participate in the discussion (or try not to). The local dive shop demands a signed pledge from all renters that they will not befoul the suit. Customers caught breaking the pledge are subject to an unmentionable fate two clicks worse than death.

For many of us, the most challenging part of learning to dive was putting on the wetsuit for the first time. Susan (of



Dave and Sue) thought she could mitigate the potential hassle by practicing the afternoon before her first open-water dive.

About the time she wriggled into the entire Farmer John with hood, mitts and booties, the UPS man arrived at her door with a package. He managed to deliver the parcel and collect her signature without too strong a visible reaction to the neoprene nymphet. Her mom didn't fare quite so well. When Mom saw the getup, she began mumbling to herself; something to the effect of "Where did we go wrong?" and "Why does she spend all her money on strange rubber things?"

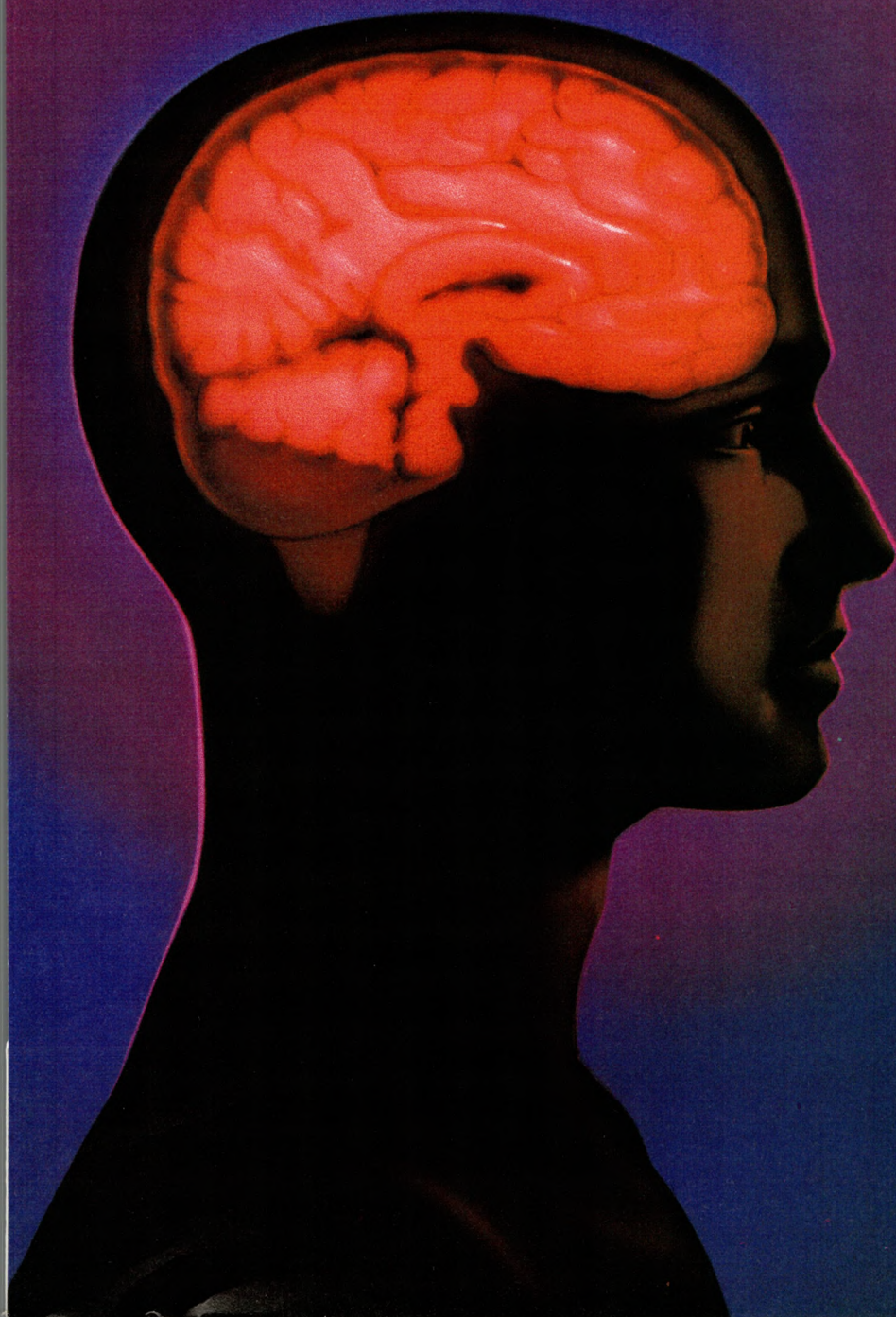
Certainly there have been substantial improvements over the years. Many of our friends manufactured their own suits during the early years of sport diving. They'd lie down on sheets of neoprene and sort of trace their bodies. After cutting out the parts, they'd glue them together into some semblance of a wetsuit. Some of these guys still seem to be suffering from the effects of sniffing all that glue.

Dive equipment has improved so dramatically over the years that it's not unreasonable to expect great strides in wetsuit design. The time will come when they are a zillionth of an inch thick, warm as a wood stove and easier to put on than a pair of pajamas. It seems certain that this type suit will appear about the time they're pushing us into the water in a waterproof wheelchair.

Meanwhile, wetsuits seem to be like the old cliché about men/women . . . "can't live with them, can't live without them." ▀

— Dave and Sue Millhouser

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The Aladin Nitrox lets you dive on air or program in an amount of Oxygen from 22% to 50%, in 2% increments.

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The Aladin Nitrox estimates the Oxygen uptake according to workload and has a CNS clock to keep an eye on Oxygen toxicity.

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Naturally, there are a few technical details you should know about Nitrox before you use the Aladin, and these are taught at any number of specialized dive centers.

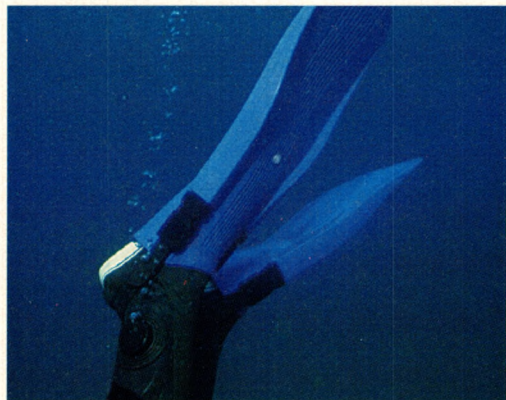
All in all, the most trying thing about the Aladin Nitrox is deciding where you should dive.

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— WITH FOOT VALVES

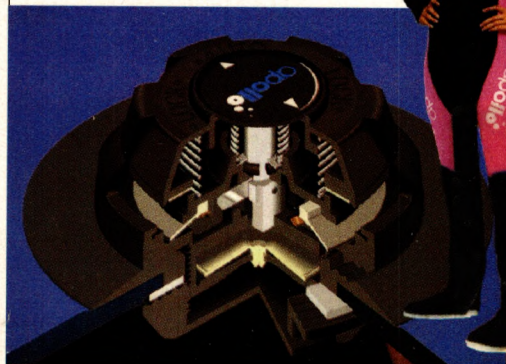


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